Don't Close Your Eyes

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Don't Close Your Eyes

by frenchfries4life

Summary

Made of glass. That’s what Jimin is. He glitters like a million diamonds but shatters at so much as a scuff. A rosy yet fragile little lamb born on winter’s solstice.

It’s too bad that the only safety he knows is in the hands of the butcher.

With some beautiful occasional artwork by Alek.Dar!!

Notes

I would appreciate it if you could take the time to read this author's note before getting to the story.

Woohoo!!!!!! I can't believe I finally finished this fic. I've been working on it for nearly two years, pretty much since early 2022. And life has been busy too...

So let's get into it!!!

First and foremost, thank you for being here!

This work contains the following themes:
1. Graphic depictions of violence.
2. Non-consensual filming, and pretty much overall predatory behaviour.
3. Heterosexual relationships (not graphic and not in detail), but essential to the plot.
4. Highly dubious consent.
5. Abusive relationships (emotional and physical).
6. Taehyung is a TERRIBLE person in this story and it goes without saying that it does not reflect in ANY way how I see him or believe him to be in real life. We all know he's a sweetie pie
Please turn away if any of these themes are harmful to you!!

And please PLEASE have faith in this story. I've worked really hard on it and this is a kind request to please have trust in me and the story!!!! Some things may not happen immediately. I have prioritized the narrative and plot over everything, and I hope it shows and you give this story a chance!!

I wrote this story for Sunny (SunnyJinx), who has been such a darling and has supported me so much over the past while. I'm sure you all know that I'd pretty much stopped posting, but thanks to this fic I feel like I was able to break out of my burnout. This fic was the only one I was passionate enough about to see through to completion.

And as always, thank you so much to my darling Anna (annafeu) for always helping me beta and being there for me. And also Ina (cappuccinokyu) for her support and for making some of the wonderful moodboards for this story!! And I can't forget Yana (odetojoon) and Jaimee (closetfairy) for all their support too, and for giving me the confidence to finally complete this. There were many times I'd contemplated abandoning this story (which is why I thought I'd finish it first) but their support is what kept me going.

Thank you so much for being here!!! I'm so excited to have something to post after so long finally. This story is pre-written and I'll be posting a new chapter every 10 days till the end of the story, on the 7th, 17th and 27th of every month.

And now finally, here's the prologue!!! I hope you enjoy <3

See the end of the work for more notes

Prologue

Chapter Summary

> And so it begins.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Taehyung absolutely hates Valentine's Day.

But he also loves it, because he knows he's going to get laid.

He leans back against the dark wood of his chair, tipping back on the spindled legs of it. He'd put a little more of an effort into his appearance for tonight, wearing a black buttoned shirt and dress pants. His hair is combed back rather than his usual look - tousled curls over his forehead, spilling into his dark eyes. He'd even put on cologne.

All because Lee Haein isn't an easy girl to fuck.

Taehyung doesn't like the fact that he can't fuck someone. Doesn't matter if he actually wants to fuck them. He just likes to, needs to know that if he ever did so much as imply it, the person before him would drop to their knees without much preamble.

Lee Haein is the president of the class next to Taehyung's. She's a virgin despite being alarmingly pretty. He knows this because none of his friends has bragged about fucking her yet, and neither her pictures nor her name has been circulated in the seedy group chat he shares with other unsavoury boys in his school, and some young adults in their small, close-knit town.

So Taehyung wants to fuck her. Wants to be the first.

He's been working up to it too, plenty of grueling effort put into this little conquest. He'd taken her number off Moonsuk's phone, who she meets regularly to discuss ardent issues pertaining to the activities of the student council. And then he messaged her. Started off with slow compliments. Telling her that he liked the way she'd pinned back her hair one morning. Tipping her off about gifts he'd left for her to find. Saying that she's the most enthralling person he'd ever met, and so easy to fall in love with. Drinking it all in when she ate up his words like candy, blushing whenever her phone buzzed, breaking her rule of no texting during after-class library hours, so desperate to reply.

It was all anonymous at the start. He didn't tell her who he was, not for a while. Because he wanted the reveal to be grand, and to be able to see it on her face. The shock, the surprise, the admiration. He wanted to drink it all up. Every last drop.

Because he's Kim Taehyung. He's the captain of the swim team and also represents their school in judo and taekwondo. He's tall, and he's handsome and he's also the worst person you'll ever meet all at once. And unfortunately, he ticks all the boxes of *unhealthy school crush*.

And then, finally, Taehyung messaged her asking to meet. After 3 months of sordid, brain-dead, boring buildup. In a public place, so that she wouldn't feel nervous to meet him alone. It was a restaurant on the outskirts of their town, a family-owned eatery, miles away from the risk of them being seen by people they know.

She'd been shocked to learn that it was him. Gaped at him like a trout from where she sat in one of the little booths inside, dressed in her Sunday finest, eyeing his clothing that matched the description he gave her of what to look for. Her fairytale prince.

They had their first date then, and Taehyung deduced that she was a boring little prude. She didn't even let him kiss her, blushing and spluttering, pushing him away before telling him *maybe next time*.

A few more fruitless dates later, and it's Valentine's Day. Today. And Taehyung's taken Haein out to eat in a fancy restaurant. Did the whole bouquet of roses and sticky sweet chocolate box.

Taehyung hates having to wait.

There's only one time that he actually waited. And that's because he genuinely believed that the reward would be worth it. And he was right.

That's not the case right now.

Haein's talking about her day. And Taehyung just wants to know whether he's going to get his dick wet by the time the night ends.

"Haein," he starts, cutting her off mid-sentence. She stops talking immediately, highly attentive.

"I really like you," Taehyung confesses, his voice deep, eyes brimming with a tragic longing. "You're the most beautiful girl I've ever met."

Heat rises to her cheeks in ruddy red, and her fingers tighten over her fork. She's silent, the only sounds audible being the romantic violin playing and the delicate clinking of cutlery around them.

"And I want to know whether you like me back."

"I-"

"Let me finish," he interjects, assertive. "I'd like to make love to you tonight."

Taehyung knows the answer's a no. Because her face falls immediately.

"I c-can't," she stutters. "Not yet."

Taehyung quirks up an eyebrow.

"I'm saving myself for marriage," she reveals coyly, seeming embarrassed but still firm. "So I can't, not right n-now."

She says it like they're going to fall in love and settle down in a 2 story home with a white picket fence.

Taehyung's face doesn't change. She seems to grow nervous, already used to his gentle smiles and reassuring demeanour. It's just vanished now. Taehyung seems like a different person all of a sudden.

"I d-don't mean to disappoint you, really, I like you so much, I promise," Haein rambles. "I want to. I really do. But I promised God-"

Taehyung isn't really listening. He leans forward, letting his arm dart underneath the table, wading through the pristine tablecloth. His long fingers come into contact with the bare skin of her thigh that peeks out of her little dress, and he relishes the way she jumps.

"T-Taehyung," she squeaks. Her hand rests on top of his, but she isn't pushing him away.

"What's the point in waiting, Haein?" Taehyung prods. "There's no fun in that." The pads of his fingers drift over her skin, relishing the goosebumps that spread across the milky flesh. He knows he's crossing a million lines and more, touching her so intimately without asking her first, but he doesn't care. Never did.

"If you really didn't want to sleep with me, you wouldn't have come out tonight wearing something like this. I even overheard you telling your mother that you're spending the night at your friend's. That's a lie, isn't it? I can't believe that she bought it. Doesn't she know that it's Valentine's Day?"

Haein remains silent. The ambient music of the restaurant plays on, the dim lighting doing nothing to hide her fiery red face. She's sweating lightly.

"You were planning to spend the night with me all along. So what's this rubbish about waiting for marriage?" His tone is stable, and calm. "I know you like me. We like each other. What's the problem?"

She doesn't protest.

Less than 15 minutes later, Taehyung's taking Haein's virginity in his car. She's unnecessarily touchy, running her hands up and down his back, wanting to kiss during. It annoys him so he flips her over, holding her down. Taehyung takes what he wants, and doesn't care about getting her off. He finishes, pulls away, zips his pants up, and tells her to get dressed. She's silent for a few seconds, confused, but listens.

Taehyung drops her off at her friend's house. He smiles at her as she walks into the home, and makes a show of waiting till she enters. The door isn't even half open yet before he's speeding off.

There's an itch under his skin that hasn't been sated yet. And there's only one way to get his real fix. There always has been.

On the way there, Taehyung stops at the first signal and pulls out his phone.

Haein: Thank you for tonight

Haein: It all happened so quickly. Can you come back and get me please? I'm not feeling very good. I can stay at yours. I feel like we need to talk about it and be together right now

Haein: If not today can we meet tomorrow please?

Haein: Taehyung?

He blocks her.

Taehyung pulls up the group chat.

Me: Haein moans like a slut

Me: [Attached Image]

Me: [Attached Image]

Me: [Attached Video]

Hyungsoo: Fuck dude, u recorded her?

Me: So unmemorable that its the only way id remember lol. Where's my 50,000 won

Yoongi: You're fucking sick. You said you wouldn't do this shit anymore

Mingyu: Boohoo Yoongi. Just take the jerk material and shut up

Yoongi: I'm not gonna watch it

Me: C'mon, yoooonnssss

Yoongi has left the group chat.

Taehyung scoffs, looking up and realizing that the light's green. He chucks his phone onto the passenger seat and continues driving.

Momentarily, he remembers that it is in fact Valentine's Day. And he doesn't really care about Valentine's Day, but he needs to for tonight.

Taehyung stops at a convenience store that's attached to a gas station. He picks up a cheap bouquet of roses and steals a freebie ring in a plastic bag that's stuck to one of those magazines for teenagers. He buys a bar of chocolate too, making sure to pick the hazelnut one. He's surprised he even remembered.

Taehyung pays and gets back into his car and drives all the way to a quaint middle-class neighbourhood near their town's old cinema. He cruises till he reaches the 4th lane, and it's all muscle memory at this point, the way he pulls to a stop a few spots away from a specific little house. He parks, gets out, and starts to walk, approaching the house from the rear and hopping the fence.

Taehyung analyses the windows. 2 bedrooms on the second storey have their lights on. The drawing room lights downstairs are on too. There's a car missing from the driveway, but the silver sedan Taehyung was hoping not to see is parked nice and cosy in its designated spot.

Taehyung sniffs at his collar, hoping there are no remnants of Haein's fruity perfume. There aren't.

He walks over to the left side of the house, and eyes the larger balcony on the second floor. He can hear the sounds of a wind chime tinkling inside, which means that the door is open. Perfect.

Taehyung loops the bag of gifts on his arm and begins to scale the house. He uses the built-in arches and ridges of stone as leverage, endless practice making this as easy as breathing. He's done this countless times.

He hauls himself over the railing and his feet touch smooth tiles.

Inside the room, through the flowing sheer curtains of the door, he can see a pair of familiar legs up in the air where they lay in bed, slim ankles crossed. Endless supple skin.

There's a pulse of something hungry in his rotten, decaying heart. An endless pit of it.

Taehyung steps in and clears his throat.

Jimin jumps from where he was strewn over his cosy bed and scrolling through his phone. He turns around, and his face goes through a range of emotions as their eyes meet.

Fear. Recognition. Surprise. Happiness. Love.

“Tae!” he practically squeals, leaping off his bed and jumping into his arms. Taehyung catches him, always does, enclosing him in a warm embrace. “I thought you had plans with your parents!”

Jimin’s vibrating with excitement against him.

“I’ll always have time for you,” Taehyung whispers lovingly into his hair, breathing in the scent of jasmine shampoo. He lets his hands drift down the soft cotton of Jimin’s sleep shirt, resisting the urge to grab his ass, spilling out of his tiny little shorts.

Jimin lifts his face up from where it was squished into Taehyung’s neck, gazing up at him. He presses a kiss to his lips.

“Happy Valentine’s day, baby,” Taehyung wishes, tilting his head down and kissing him deeper, slow and filthy. Jimin’s little fingers ball into his shirt, pressing closer. It goes on this way for a while, Taehyung nipping at his plush bottom lip, licking into his sweet mouth. He doesn’t have to look to know that there’s going to be a mountain of candy wrappers on Jimin’s bed, all of which he can taste on his tongue.

Jimin’s arm knocks into the bag, and he pulls away, cute eyebrows furrowed at the sensation.

“What’s this?” He asks, squinting at it.

Taehyung smiles, pulling out the bouquet of roses, the chocolate bar and the cheap plastic ring.

It was all rushed, and cost him barely anything.

But Jimin seems to feel like Taehyung's lassoed the moon and brought it down for him.

"Tae," he whines, his voice melting softer and sweeter. He presses his nose to the cheap roses, breathing in their fragrant and cloyingly sweet scent. He gives each one of the gifts their due attention, opening up the bar of chocolate and popping a square in his mouth and then Taehyung's.

And then, Jimin sees the ring.

"It's so pretty," he gasps, staring at it. "I can't believe you did all of this for me. Thank you."

"I did it because I love you," Taehyung admits. "We've been dating for a year now and you still can't believe it?"

Jimin doesn't respond, instead sliding the cheap pink plastic ring onto his chubby index finger, all while blushing furiously. His eyes are starry and stout with love. The ring gets stuck at the halfway point, the glitter on it sticking to his skin.

"It won't fit," he whines. He tries a few more times before he gives up. "I'm sorry, Tae. I really love it. I can try looping a chain through it and wearing it as a pendant."

"That's okay," Taehyung reassures. "I'm just happy that you like it. That's all that matters to me. I was so nervous when I bought it, spent so long picking it out-"

Jimin kisses him, giddy.

When he pulls away, he's looking into Taehyung's eyes. There's something nervous in his expression.

“What?” Taehyung asks, fond, stroking his hands down Jimin’s sides. He stares at the endearing softness of his cheeks, the way his dewy skin catches the dim lights of the room. For a second, life turns slow, and he drinks it all in, eyes dancing over his delectable features.

“I want to talk to you about something,” Jimin responds. “Something kind of serious.”

“You’re pregnant?”

“Ha ha,” Jimin deadpans. “I’m not kidding.”

“What is it?”

Jimin hesitates for a few moments.

“I w-want to tell my parents. And Yoongi hyung. About us,” he reveals hesitantly. He’s picking at a button on Taehyung’s shirt, shifting on his feet, his eyes averted.

Taehyung’s insides turn into ice.

“We’ve spoken about this,” he responds, his voice dropping an octave, a smidge harder. “Private is good. It’s so much easier to date when no one knows about us.”

“Yeah, but I want to at least tell my brother,” Jimin continues, frowning. “Yoongi hyung wouldn’t mind! You guys are friends. I don’t like keeping things from him.”

Yoongi would mind. Yoongi would murder Taehyung if he found out that he’d been fucking his little brother for the better part of the last year and a half.

“You know that I’m committed to you. All we need is each other,” Taehyung says, digging his thumbs into Jimin’s waist. “Just trust me.”

It’s all carefully set and built, this illusion, planned to the last, minuscule detail. Taehyung would never date someone openly. But he also can’t let Jimin go, and Jimin isn’t one for a no strings attached relationship. He’s had a crush on Taehyung since he was 14. Believes in the whole soulmates and happily ever after sitch. If Jimin tells Yoongi, it would all be over. Taehyung can continue to be himself if everything stays under wraps.

Jimin pouts.

“But-”

There’s a knock on the door.

“Jimin?” Yoongi’s rough voice is audible through the thin wood. “I’m here to say good night. Is someone in there with you?”

Taehyung’s jaw clenches and his stomach drops. Jimin squeaks.

“N-No, hyung!”

The doorknob turns, and it catches. Taehyung exhales a sigh of relief. It’s locked.

“I thought I heard another voice,” Yoongi prods, and Taehyung can almost see his narrowed eyes. “Why’s the door locked?”

“I’m practising for drama club, go away!” Jimin whines petulantly.

There’s a few seconds of silence, and then Yoongi chuckles.

“Alright, hyung won’t bother you.” The smile is audible in his voice. “Sleep well, Minnie.”

“You too, hyung,” Jimin wishes meekly.

The both of them wait till they hear receding footsteps, and Jimin sags against Taehyung’s chest.

“Oh my god, I was gonna puke,” Jimin exhales. Taehyung holds him up, dipping down to nose along his cheek.

“See? This is why we can’t tell anyone. You were so scared just at the prospect of Yoongi finding out about us.”

“Yes, but that’s because he would’ve found out *without* me telling him first. I don’t like lying to him. I-”

“It’s all the same, isn’t it?” Taehyung interrupts. “I know best, Jiminie. Trust me. It’s a bad idea.” He drops a wet kiss onto the tip of his pretty nose.

Before Jimin can voice any more concerns, Taehyung kisses him fully. He kisses him in a way that he knows will make Jimin lose grasp on his train of thought. He winds his arms around his waist, licking into his mouth. Jimin seems to melt, his stubby fingers splayed over Taehyung’s angular cheeks.

Taehyung picks him up and carries him to bed. Jimin feels featherlight and fragile in his arms, something that makes him near dizzy. It’s a haze after that, just skin against skin, searing hot. Taehyung’s hand smoothing down the familiar shape of Jimin’s plush thigh, drowning himself in the way he feels around him. Tight, hot, unrelenting. Always the same. Always the best. Incomparable, a drug Taehyung wasn’t expecting to stumble upon but is now addicted to. The litany of soft moans in his ear, puffs of hot exhaled breath against his

cheek. The sounds are restrained, probably rooted in fear of his hyung coming by again and catching them. Their fingers are intertwined for some part of it, intimacy craved rather than shunned. The cheap ring is still stuck on Jimin's finger, and Taehyung relishes the clench of his heat around him as he cums.

So endlessly satisfying.

As Taehyung lies in bed later, Jimin pillowed against his chest and deep in his dreams, he wonders if he'll ever find the will to change.

Chapter End Notes

And, that's the prologue!! Thank you so SO much for reading!! I hope you enjoyed it.

I'm SOOOOOO excited to hear what you think so please feel free to leave a comment if you'd like to share your thoughts, favourite moments or anything you like with me! I haven't completed a story in a really long time and hearing from you would mean the world to me. Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all!!! I'll see you all in the new year with the first official chapter <3

Chapter 1: Ground Zero

Chapter Notes

Here's the first chapter!!! Thank you so much reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

Beautiful moodboard made by Ina (cappuccinokyu) <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jimin is the first boy Taehyung fucked, and will be the only one.

He knew that Yoongi had a little brother. Heard of him in bits and pieces, when Yoongi would dip from scenes earlier than others to pick Jimin up from his cram school, or stop whatever he was doing to reply to his texts and answer his calls. Yoongi loved his brother more than anything in the world, and it was clear to everyone around him. He was fiercely protective, and he'd sent someone to the hospital for calling Jimin a slur.

Yoongi's little brother is gay, Seungchan whispered to him in the locker room the evening after the big fight, during their first year of high school. The two of them stared at Yoongi as he put on his mouthguard and adjusted his taekwondo uniform. They eyed his bruised knuckles, streaked with clotted blood and torn skin just starting to heal. Yoongi wasn't, still

isn’t, one to lash out violently, and it was rare for any of them to see anything but indifference in his demeanour. It was jarring to say the least.

In their small town, being gay was unheard of.

Taehyung was surprised, mildly caught off guard, but didn’t think much of it. In fact, it made him respect Yoongi a little more than he already did. For standing his ground and putting people in their place. Qualities of a true man. His kid brother being gay had nothing to do with Taehyung, and the hot topic fizzled out into fleeting, temporary gossip that quickly grew old.

It didn’t matter to Taehyung. It wasn’t any of his business.

But a year later, when Jimin finally enrolled in their school, it did become his business.

Taehyung can still recall it vividly. Jimin was wearing their school uniform. The typical blazer, tie, pressed shirt and pants. Just like everyone else. But Taehyung, he’d always been a sucker for the details. He was immediately drawn to Jimin’s soft features, rosy and inviting. He was alluring beyond anything he had ever seen before. The way he had subtle nail polish on, and the little clip in his silky hair. Wide warm eyes and plush, plump lips. The socks, and the cute little flower pins in his school bag, pink phone case. All dressed up for his first day of high school. He looked like a fairy, almost a doll, something you’d expect to find in a gift box during Christmas, in plastic packaging with accessories to go with it. The kind of face you’d find in a Kisaeng house back in the day. He was smaller than him in a way that made Taehyung’s mouth go dry, his fingers twitching by his sides. Petite, pretty, pure and pristine.

And that’s when the pit of hunger was dug in. Right in the tender spot underneath Taehyung’s heart, deep within his ribs, aching and pulsing. Wrought with need.

Taehyung breezed past him in the hallway, wool between his ears, head fuzzy, hazy gaze not leaving him for a single second. He felt parched, nearly wild, his blood pumping. Jimin’s eyes caught his as they crossed paths, and his face flamed, mouth dropping open lightly.

Deep inside his mind, Taehyung had staked a claim right then and there.

There weren't too many opportunities for them to meet though. Not at first. Taehyung's classes spanned across different timings, and his extracurriculars and practices meant staying back after hours. But his ears would always perk up when Jimin's name would appear in conversation, either from his teammates making snide remarks or from Yoongi himself as he bailed out of plans for the sake of his brother. Everyone knew that Yoongi was just using Jimin as an excuse to not hang out with them. But the bottom line is, Taehyung's entire body language changed the moment Jimin was brought up in conversation, highly inclined.

Jimin was so unapologetically himself. And no one in his class liked that. He didn't have many friends at all, and Yoongi frequently helped him out with his assignments because he'd land up without a partner most of the time.

Taehyung started to take notice. He knew he wanted to fuck Jimin. That much was certain. But it was also more than that. Taehyung wanted to consume him, eat him up whole. To squeeze him till his pretty head popped. It was difficult to explain. He knew he was controlling, and had erratic tendencies when wound up, his swim team mostly catching the brunt of that, but he'd never felt it so strongly before.

Jimin was annoyingly out of reach, and Taehyung adamantly wanted to close that gap.

The first time they spoke, it was when Taehyung had visited Yoongi's house. All while knowing that said person wouldn't be home just yet.

Jimin had opened the door.

"Oh, Taehyung-ssi" he greeted with a small bow, and it was the first time he'd heard his voice. It was perfect. Soft and a smidge high. But maybe that's because he was nervous. Taehyung didn't know that Jimin knew his name. "Yoongi hyung isn't home right now."

"Maybe I'm here to see you."

"I-"

“You know my name,” Taehyung stated, quirking up an eyebrow.

“We’ve m-met before,” Jimin answered, red in the face, still gripping the doorframe with his stubby fingers. Taehyung’s vision dipped down to look at his cute socks patterned with a donut print.

“We have?” Taehyung questioned, vision inching up to his cute face. Jimin had droopy eyes, and clear, well looked after skin. He was so unbelievably pretty that Taehyung couldn’t take his eyes off him. He didn’t look anything at all like the rest of the boys in their town, or in Taehyung’s class. Sure, there were tons of people who were naturally smaller in stature, born with softer, less jarring features. But, there were none quite like Jimin. Not even amongst the girls. The other boy presented himself differently, almost as if tailored to fit everything that makes Taehyung’s mind tick and dick twitch. Taehyung liked the choice of pastel colours, and the selection of soft, delicate fabrics. The barely-there makeup that’s just subtle enough to enhance his features without adulteration. Jimin was feminine, and Taehyung had always seen femininity as something weak. And he liked weakness. Because it made him feel stronger.

“Yes. Well, not directly. I saw you at one of your matches. I’d come to see my brother’s fight and stuck around to watch yours as well.”

“Did you enjoy it?” Taehyung asked, his ego inflating at an alarming pace. He knew that what the other boy must’ve seen was great, or impressive. Taehyung had never lost a single competitive match. His mind was moving like molasses, slow and heady. He let his eyes explore.

Jimin had no body hair, and Taehyung looked carefully at his upper lip and chin to see if he could spot a hint of a stubble, anything to shatter this new lust-stricken daze. All he found was a cute mole, and baby soft skin. He was going to die.

“It was nice,” Jimin answered politely, eyes on the floor. He was acting like he was talking to his crush, shifting on his feet, voice soft. His coy, *virgin bride*-like countenance amused and intrigued Taehyung.

“Am I making you nervous?” Taehyung asked then. “Stranger danger?”

“No!” Jimin spluttered, finally meeting his gaze. His face, neck and ears were a deep shade of pink. “I’m sorry if I’m being impolite. I just wasn’t expecting to meet you, or talk to you.”

“You’re so cute,” Taehyung said, drinking up his reaction. “Will you keep me company till Yoongi gets home?”

Jimin seemed surprised that Taehyung wanted to hang out with him. Still, he smiled lightly, eyes twinkling, and opened the door.

And that was when it all began, really.

-

Haein’s flunking her classes.

She barely shows up to school anymore, and her earlier pristine academic record is now spangled with glaring red 0s and concerned notes from teachers. Taehyung only knows because Moonsuk is now thrilled that he’s surpassed her as the highest scoring student in their grade.

Taehyung acts like she doesn’t exist.

She approached him last week in the cafeteria, but Taehyung pretended that it was their first time meeting. It was an intimidating situation that worked against her already crumbling resolve. Taehyung’s friends were around to hear every word that dripped out of her mouth. Of course, she didn’t know that every single one of them had also seen her naked and spread out in the back of Taehyung’s car, nor did she know that Taehyung recorded her in the first place. Their group chat was a well-kept secret.

“Taehyung, we need to talk.”

“Hi, Haein. What about?”

A few seconds of silence. She gulped, seeming shocked at his indifference towards her.

“I-”

“Is there anything I can help you with?”

“I w-wanted to talk.” Her voice quivered, eyes rapidly growing wet. She was pale as a ghost.

“About what?” Taehyung asked, rolling his eyes and laughing lightly as their conversation circled around. His friends snickered around them.

Haein tried to respond, but she started to cry mid-sentence. That was when the school bell rang, and Taehyung picked up his empty plate, disposed of it and walked out of the cafeteria. Straight past her, leaving her right there to cry. A few other girls looked on, some curious and fishing for gossip, others knowing, because it’d happened to them too.

Taehyung didn’t see Haein after that. Not that he cared to look.

If Haein’s flunking her classes and dropping out of school just because of what happened, maybe she shouldn’t have been such a slut. Sound logic in Taehyung’s mind. Why were girls so *fragile*?

Jimin’s like that too, a nasty voice spoke in his mind. *You just keep him padded in bubble wrap because he’s your favourite toy*.

Jimin reminds Taehyung of this one chocolate box he used to eat from when he was younger. His grandmother used to make chocolates at her home. Simple ones, no nuts or additives, no flavour enhancers or fancy shapes. Simple yet sumptuously indulgent. Taehyung used to eat other branded chocolates, all the time, but he was never satisfied. All he could think about each time was how much better the chocolates tasted at his grandmother's house. And nothing would ever compare. He'd go there as often as he liked to, and open the pristine carved box with gold piping and patterned detailing.

He'd sit by the chocolate box, grab a handful of the sweets, tear apart their gold foil wrappers and stuff each one into his little mouth, uncaring of the fact that the box was steadily growing empty, remnants of the sticky sweet smeared over his mouth. He looked like a wild animal devouring a decaying, hollow carcass, stripping it of everything it had.

But there were always more chocolates. More for Taehyung to take. More more more. He didn't ever like being told no.

There were chocolates every day, until there weren't.

-

"Have you started applying to colleges yet?" Jimin asks, cuddling up to him. Taehyung loops an arm around his waist and pulls him closer, nuzzling into his neck and making him squirm and giggle. They rarely hang out at Taehyung's place.

"Why?" Taehyung shoots back.

"Yoongi hyung was telling my parents and I about where he's applying to. He wants to go to Seoul. He's so responsible, you know. He's doing all his research, applications and paperwork himself. I even offered to help but he said no. I want to be just like him."

Taehyung hums. "I've thought of a few places. Seoul's one of them."

Jimin’s fingers freeze where they were earlier rubbing circles into his tummy. He’s quiet.

“What?” Taehyung asks.

“You’re moving away?” Jimin asks, voice timid yet the disappointment is clear as day.

“I mean, yeah. There’s no way I’m going to study here,” Taehyung says around a laugh. “I was always going to leave.”

Jimin’s silent, and all Taehyung can feel is his breathing. He can’t see Jimin’s face.

“I’ll come to Seoul too when I graduate,” Jimin announces then, rather adamantly. “Then I’ll be with you and Yoongi hyung.”

Taehyung thinks it’s cute. He wonders if Jimin is smart enough to be able to get into good colleges in Seoul. He then realizes that he doesn’t know anything about how Jimin scores in school. There are a lot of things he hasn’t made an effort to learn about Jimin. He knows the basic things, like what makes him cum the hardest and how to tell when he’s hungry. Concurrently, Jimin frequently bombards Taehyung with all sorts of questions about his life and interests. Taehyung likes thinking of Jimin as a closed-off, exclusive escape. A great way to beat stress and fuck his tensions out, something only for him. Jimin was a virgin when they first had sex, and Taehyung makes sure his dick is the only one he’ll sit on.

Whenever he thinks about Jimin with someone else, his vision bleeds black around the corners.

“You’d want that, right?” Jimin prods hesitantly. Taehyung had been so wound up in his thoughts that he’d forgotten to respond. “We’ll still date even when you’re in Seoul, right?”

Jimin’s voice is wafer-thin, small with hope and down with raging anxiety.

“Of course,” Taehyung answers, reaching down to grab a fistful of his ass. He squeezes the fat playfully, then reaches up to tilt Jimin’s face to see him and breathe him in, squishing his cheeks so that his lips push out into a plush beak. The other boy’s eyes are soft and slightly wet. “How can I let you go, hmm?”

Jimin smiles then, relieved, and brings a hand up to wipe away a stray tear.

“You’re crying?” Taehyung teases, using his long fingers to gently wipe away the fresh wave of tears rolling down his cherubic cheeks.

“Y-Yeah,” Jimin responds wetly. “I was scared you wouldn’t want to do long distance. ‘ve been thinking about it for so long.”

“Don’t worry about it, baby,” Taehyung reassures. “I have something for you, by the way.”

“What is it?”

Taehyung sits up and Jimin whines at the lost warmth. He reaches for a fancy looking bag on his desk, one he knows Jimin spotted as soon as he’d entered his room earlier in the day. It’s a nice glossy black bag, the lettering on it in embossed intricately in gold foil. He hands it to Jimin.

The other boy sits up, his thick thighs exposed as the large t-shirt he’s wearing rides up, hanging off his petite frame. It’s one of Taehyung’s old ones, fabric worn soft and faded. It smells like him. A few hickeys on Jimin’s inner thighs peek out too, and he shivers as Taehyung digs his thumbs into the mottled purple.

Jimin takes the bag gratefully, always eager to receive gifts.

He pulls out the bundle nestled snugly inside, wrapped delicately in featherlight pink tissue. It’s held together with a matching pink satin ribbon. One tug and it’s open, and Jimin

carefully peels it away to reveal the box inside, opening it quickly and peering in with excited eyes.

“Huh?” Jimin asks as he sees the lingerie set.

“You like it?” Taehyung asks, his voice deep, leaning in to nip at the shell of his cute ear, peppering kisses down his swan-like neck.

“This is for *me*?” Jimin asks, seeming surprised. He lifts up the strappy baby pink panties, and gawks at the coquettish bow in the front. Hardly a sliver of fabric, but as soft as silk. What seems to really get him scandalised is the matching A-cup bra.

“Yeah,” Taehyung responds, already feeling himself grow hard just imagining him in it. “Wanna fuck you while you’re wearing it.”

“You want me to wear a *bra*?” Jimin whisper yells. He looks down at his flat chest.

“Fuck, yes,” Taehyung groans, rubbing his stubble all over Jimin’s soft cheeks. The other boy squirms away, whining about how it’s probably ruining his skin.

“I-uh, I don’t know-” Jimin starts, sounding unsure. “I don’t think it would look good on me. Plus we already did it.”

“You don’t know unless you try,” Taehyung drawls out. “Try it on for me.”

Jimin looks extremely uncomfortable. Taehyung doesn’t give a shit. He nods his head, sitting down on the bed and leaning back on his elbows so he can get a good look.

Jimin stands up, and hesitantly pulls on the skimpy panties. He stands right in front of Taehyung, and it’s like he’s putting on a little show. Except, that’s only how it looks in

Taehyung's depraved mind. In reality, Jimin's biting at his lip, ears fiery red and tummy twisting. He's careful with the delicate fabric, shimmying it up his narrow hips. There's a distinct lack of curves that the panties are meant to hug, but the slight flash of his abdomen makes Taehyung's dick pulse. Taehyung stares at his petite body, his narrow waist. His fingers itch to rest on the dips of either side, knowing from the millions of times he's done it that his thumbs will meet in the middle. Just envisioning it has his mouth growing dry, gut pulsing with want.

And then, Jimin pulls Taehyung's t-shirt over and off his head. It's just him in the cute panties, and Taehyung's tenting his pants.

"Put the bra on," he commands.

"Tae-"

"Put it on," Taehyung repeats.

Jimin hesitantly reaches for the bra. He struggles for a while to get it on, floundering to put the clasps in place. He turns around so his back is to Taehyung while he figures it out, and he would complain if he didn't have the view of Jimin's fat ass swallowing the thin g-string.

When Jimin's done, he just stands there for a while, shifting on his dainty little feet.

"Turn around," Taehyung says, practically orders. He reaches down to squeeze his hard cock in his pants.

Jimin does, albeit hesitantly. And Taehyung's mouth goes dry.

"There," the other boy says, eyes averted and mouth curved downward. "Can I take it off now? I-"

“You’re so sexy,” Taehyung breathes out. He grabs Jimin by his hips, yanking him closer. And then he grasps Jimin’s waist the way he wanted to earlier, sucking in a breath when his thumbs meet in the middle, just under Jimin’s cute belly button. He strokes his thumbs up and down, feeling the way they catch in the dips of his fragile ribcage. If he was to squeeze harder, he’s sure Jimin’s little bones would snap. His cock jerks in his sweats, achingly hard.

“I look like an idiot,” Jimin whines, gasping as Taehyung licks a stripe up his tummy. He forces his hands up and underneath the bra, pinching at his rosy nipples.

“No, you don’t,” Taehyung almost growls, tugging Jimin onto his lap. His hard dick presses against his ass. Taehyung pushes the panties to the side and prods at his slick, stretched out hole. His lips close over Jimin’s right nipple that peeks out of the bra, teeth catching at the bud and pulling a sweet, *sweet* whine and gasping breath out of his honeyed mouth. They’d fucked like rabbits barely 30 minutes ago.

“Y-You like it this much?” Jimin asks breathily, seeming surprised. “‘M sore,” he then whines as he feels Taehyung add more pressure.

“Suck me off then, I’ll take care of you after. C’mon, Jiminie-”

“Okay,” Jimin concedes softly, slipping off his lap and sinking to his knees by the foot of the bed, right in between Taehyung’s outstretched legs. He doesn’t think he’s even been this hard in his entire life, his cock pulsing hot and heavy.

Jimin pulls down the band of his sweats to reveal his cock, an angry shade of red, intimidatingly thick.

“You’re so hard,” he muses, starting to jerk him lightly, excruciatingly good with the regular practice Taehyung gives him.

Jimin leans down to swipe his tongue over the pulsing head, small fingers attempting to enclose the girth. He wraps his lips around it then, tight and hot, sinking down in short little bursts, fat lips stretched wide.

“Fuck,” Taehyung groans. “You’re so fucking good at this.”

Jimin was a baby gay before Taehyung. He only knew what he did because of porn, which he’d shyly admitted to watching back then. Now, he’s like a vixen who can’t live without a dick in him. Or that’s what Taehyung imagines in his depraved head. That’s all he bothers to see.

Jimin starts to take him deeper and deeper, careful not to overwhelm himself. His eyes are closed with focus, little fingers jerking what he can’t reach just yet. Taehyung can’t wait to fuck his throat. It’s like he’s worshipping his cock, doing it leisurely and with feeling, pulling off and pressing wet kisses up and down the length before sucking him in again.

Taehyung can’t help himself. The sight of Jimin on his knees, dressed in this obscene lingerie, cock in his mouth - it’s too much.

Taehyung reaches for his phone, and starts recording. He does it openly, the camera picking up a clear feed of Jimin in his cute little useless bra, bobbing his head, desperately suckling wetly on his massive cock. He hopes the microphone picks up the sounds.

Jimin doesn’t realise immediately with his closed eyes. Taehyung gets a solid 3 minutes of raw, uninterrupted footage before Jimin’s pretty eyes flutter open, glassy gaze meeting the camera.

“T-Tae-” he starts, pulling off, face falling immediately. “What are you doing? Why are you recording me?”

Taehyung doesn’t stop, instead zooming into Jimin’s swollen lips.

“Keep going, baby. Don’t worry about it.”

“Please s-stop it, don’t record me please-” Jimin pleads, and his face seems pale now. He looks down at the skimpy lingerie set he’s wearing and his jaw sets, his hands coming up to cover his flat chest in a desperate and futile attempt at modesty.

“What’s the problem? It’s just for me. I’ll need something to remind me of you when I’m in Seoul, right?” Taehyung muses, punctuating the sentence with a slap of his cock against Jimin’s swollen lips.

“Stop it, p-please, please delete it-” Jimin continues, voice quivering. His eyes grow wet. He tries to reach for Taehyung’s phone but he holds it up high, swiping it out of his impending grasp.

Taehyung frowns at the defiance, something angry and entitled surging within him, jangling through his perverse brain.

“What’s wrong with you?” he demands, like the other boy’s behaviour is unreasonable.

Jimin’s crying now.

And Taehyung wants to hate how it makes him harder.

Jimin tries to reach for his phone again. Taehyung keeps him at bay with a hand on his trembling chest.

“T-Tae, please,” he sobs, and Taehyung gives in only once he realizes that Jimin’s having difficulty breathing. He’s shaking, cheeks sticky and pale, eyes blown wide.

“Okay, okay,” he sighs. “I’m sorry, my love.” He pulls Jimin into a hug, cradling him against his chest. Jimin lets himself be pulled into the embrace, curling up in his lap.

“Please delete it,” he whispers, fingers balling into his hoodie.

Taehyung sighs.

“You don’t trust me?” he asks. “I wouldn’t ever show this to anyone.”

It’s the truth. Taehyung wouldn’t ever circulate Jimin’s pictures or videos amongst his friends, because he’s his. Jimin isn’t like those girls Taehyung reduces to whores. He’s his own little toy, groomed to be a subservient doll, tailor-made for his fancy. Taehyung won’t share.

And also because Yoongi would find out in a flash. If Taehyung is being honest, Yoongi is the only person on this planet that he’s even remotely afraid of. He’s the only one who Taehyung can’t take in a fight, a result that’s been consistent over numerous sparring sessions and challenges. Yoongi is smaller than him and not as overtly strong, but he manages to get the upper hand each time, sending Taehyung to the ground and forcing him into a tap out faster than he can blink. And a part of him *hates* that Jimin admires and looks up to him so much, jealousy festering deep within him, even though they’re brothers.

“Do you really still want me to delete it?” Taehyung asks upon Jimin’s silence.

The other boy nods into his neck.

Taehyung sighs exasperatedly, and he makes sure Jimin watches as he hits the delete button.

“I’m sorry,” Jimin breathes out, pitchy. “I just freaked out. I w-wasn’t prepared for it.”

Taehyung hums. “It’s fine.”

Jimin’s silent for a few seconds.

“I’m still hard though,” Taehyung announces.

Jimin’s still for a while, and then he rearranges himself in Taehyung’s lap, his back to his chest. He reaches down and pulls his panties to the side, taking hold of Taehyung’s exposed cock and sinking down onto the thick length slowly.

“I thought you were sore.”

“ ‘s fine,” Jimin says quietly. His breath hitches, going up a few octaves as he’s split open. Taehyung grips his waist and helps him take him deeper, mouthing at the juncture of his neck and shoulder.

“Yoongi’s not here so I can leave marks, right?”

“Y-Yeah,” Jimin responds, gasping as Taehyung bites down. His ass finally meets Taehyung’s thighs, seated on his cock fully. He grinds his hips down, breathing in in stutters. Taehyung brings a hand down to grab at Jimin’s cock. It jarred him at first, the first time they slept together, the sight of a cock underneath Jimin’s underwear rather than a pussy. Something in him had wanted to backtrack and leave right then and there, but his mind was washed over and soon as he’d looked up and seen the expectant expression in Jimin’s eyes, waiting to be fucked. Now, pleasing him is like second nature.

“How are you still so fucking tight? I fucked you open barely 30 minutes ago,” Taehyung groans, unsatisfied with Jimin’s pace and laying on his back, pulling the other boy down with him. He plants his feet on the mattress and starts to fuck up into him, the sound of their skin slapping loud in the room. “Best pussy ever.”

Jimin’s silent, his thighs bouncing over Taehyung’s as he gets railed within an inch of his life.

“You like being stuffed full?” Taehyung demands, gripping his jaw and squishing his cheeks together. “Can’t live without my cock, right? Gotta have it all day, huh?”

“Y-Yeah,” Jimin gasps. “L-Love you.”

“I love you too, baby,” Taehyung responds, voice hard. He looks down and sees the pink head of Jimin’s cock peeking out of the flimsy waistband of his panties and something in his mind goes feral. He reaches out and pinches it cruelly, flicking it with his nails.

“Tae!” Jimin cries, his back arching.

Taehyung’s sweating. There’s a heat in his belly, and it’s like his body’s moving on autopilot, his hips swivelling and jackhammering into Jimin’s tight heat. It’s almost comforting, the feeling of him.

“You like it. You like anything I give you.”

Jimin just keens in response, turning his head so his nose is pressed into Taehyung’s sweaty neck.

“You’re gonna cum untouched,” Taehyung states, voice hoarse. Jimin had only done it once before. Taehyung took a while to learn how to pleasure Jimin, him being a boy, and he’s determined to be able to make Jimin cum without any extra effort.

“I c-can’t-”

“You will.”

Taehyung loops his arms around Jimin’s thighs and spreads him wider, using the leverage to fuck him harder, the heavy bedframe rattling violently. Jimin cries out and Taehyung’s glad that his house is big enough that his voice won’t carry to where his aloof parents work in their separate rooms. They’ve long stopped taking an interest in what their son does, and Taehyung’s glad for the distance.

He drills into Jimin's prostate, hitting it dead-on, wishing he had a mirrored ceiling so he could see the way the other boy's eyes cross. He treats him like he's nothing but a fucktoy, a glorified fleshlight, immobile and restrained for Taehyung to fuck into.

He likes that train of thought and decides to test it. He slows down the rampant pace, starting to grind up into him. Jimin doesn't complain even though Taehyung's pretty sure he was about to cum. It always comes with a string of signs - the tightening of his heat around him, his back arching, his cries becoming higher and higher, milky thighs trembling. He's been cut off his climax, and he doesn't protest even once when Taehyung starts to alternate the pace and edge him repeatedly. He just lays there on Taehyung's chest, taking what he's given, offering himself up completely. Docile. It almost feels masturbatory.

"You okay?" Taehyung prods, grip bruising on the backs of Jimin's thighs. He's spread-eagled, and he's pretty sure the strain on his hamstrings would've been painful if it weren't for Jimin's yoga habit and dancing. He digs his fingers harder into his supple skin, wanting to leave behind cords of purple.

There's a slurred response which sounds like an affirmative, so Taehyung keeps going. He eventually loses patience and starts to jackhammer into him once more, a menacing grin, almost a sneer, spreading across his lips when he feels Jimin cum with an overwhelmed cry. The contractions around his cock are maddening, and there's *that* feeling again.

That bone deep, satisfying feeling, the one that makes Taehyung feel like he's finally able to inhale oxygen freely for the first time in forever. It builds within him, close to snapping. He loves the fact that he never has to use condoms with Jimin. There's no risk of an unplanned pregnancy. Not that Taehyung's never dealt with one before.

The lace of Jimin's panties start to chafe his lower abdomen so he rips them off, angry fingers tearing the delicate fabric off his body all while still fucking him. There isn't a single thought about how he spent a large amount of money on them, now gone to waste.

Taehyung cums so hard he almost blacks out, teeth gritted. He fucks him through it, spilling deep inside of him, filling him up. Jimin lies there and takes it, and Taehyung can't resist leaning in to bite his soft cheek, getting a full mouthful. Maybe his teeth sink in a little harder than he'd anticipated.

After that, Jimin's a little dopey. He's spaced out and takes a while to understand what Taehyung's telling him. Taehyung cleans him up anyway. He asks Jimin if he wants a new lingerie set now that this one's ruined and decides he does when Jimin says he just wants to sleep. He lets Jimin have his little nap, and orders them some spaghetti and fried chicken, Jimin's favourite combo. It used to put him off at first, Jimin's appetite, Taehyung only used to girls who only eat rabbit-like salads and stay away from carbs. Now, he's starting to find it endearing.

Once Taehyung's done ordering their food, he settles into bed with Jimin and naps with him for a while. He likes the way Jimin feels in his arms, soft and small and timid, malleable. He always acts like Taehyung's the only gravity keeping him grounded, and it's evident in the way he wraps his arms and legs around him like a koala. Taehyung lets him hold him. He's never let anyone else ever.

And then, he falls asleep. He's never been able to fall asleep around other people before. Not before Jimin. Not even during sleepovers growing up, or even with his parents. He's uncomfortable with being vulnerable that way. He doesn't like that he's not conscious to keep an eye on the things around him, what people are up to. It's why he often needs to take sleeping pills, even while alone. But somehow, right now, his defences are down like they never existed in the first place. Maybe because he's never seen Jimin as a threat. His chronic insomnia feels nonexistent.

It's quiet in his brain for the first time in a very long time.

Taehyung's a light sleeper, and he's surprised that he didn't wake up with the doorbell. It's his maid who has to knock and tell him through the door that the food's arrived. She knows better than to enter without asking first. He collects the piping hot food once she's gone, and kisses Jimin awake, burying his nose into his warm skin, breathing in the scent of the baby lotion he uses because it's the only thing that doesn't irritate his sensitive skin. Sometimes they feel like a real couple.

They eat, and Taehyung drops Jimin home after.

On the way back, Taehyung makes sure to restore the video of Jimin from his cloud, and adds it to a special locked folder with the seemingly hundreds of videos he already has of the other boy.

-

Taehyung makes good on his promise of buying Jimin new lingerie.

He has a set custom made. Commissions a high end atelier for it, even gives them details about the exact fabric choice and embellishments. Jimin loved dressing up for him, he'd adore this gift. The entire set is in bridal white, handmade. He's got garters and a matching babydoll too. He'd gone too far, maybe. But it's nothing for his credit card.

Taehyung picks it up from the atelier himself. The attendants blush and toddle around as he collects it, making conversation.

"Jimin is really lucky," one of them says as she writes up his final receipt. Small business things.

Taehyung's blood runs cold.

"What?" he asks, smiling all lazy.

"Your girlfriend. Jimin," she elaborates, flushing slightly. "Sorry, but I saw her name on the collar."

Oh, he'd forgotten about that.

He'd asked for a matching choker and collar to be made with Jimin's name on them. Made of satin and leather with the letters in gold. There's a D ring in the collar too, for a leash to be looped through or even his fingers as Taehyung fucks him from behind. He imagines the noises, the wet gurgling as he chokes, and he feels himself stir in his pants.

“Yeah, she is,” Taehyung responds, taking his time to scrutinise the attendant. She looks to be in her early to late twenties, hair swept in a glossy bun and lithe frame tucked into her neat uniform. The entire boutique is all dim intimate lighting and warm colours, and it highlights the soft pout of her lips.

“You could be lucky too,” he adds, lips spreading in a lopsided grin as he looks at her, making full eye contact. Unhesitatingly confident.

Maybe she doesn’t realise he’s in high school. How could she? Taehyung’s tall and built enough to not look like a lanky kid. He’s dressed in a pristine shirt complete with an expensive belt and pressed pants, and his hair is gelled back. It’s all a part of the facade to make sure that no one bats an eye when he buys this kind of stuff.

She blushes. Her name’s on the tag that’s clipped to her breast pocket, but Taehyung doesn’t care enough to look. She rings him up and tells him that her shift ends in 30 minutes.

Taehyung waits. They take his car to a love motel he knows of that’s close to their town’s business district. She marvels at the smooth and futuristic interior of the vehicle, and Taehyung lets her have her choice of radio station. There’s no chatter.

When he’s fucking her 20 minutes later on the cheap heart-shaped bed, he asks her a question.

“Don’t you feel bad for Jimin?”

“H-Huh?” she gasps out, grasping at the sheets. Her hair’s no longer in the neat bun, now strewn over the nylon sheets, the type that are made specifically to be able to remove stains with ease.

“Jimin. My girlfriend. The one whose gift you snooped through earlier. Don’t you feel bad for her? You’re fucking her boyfriend,” Taehyung elaborates calmly, hips rolling, pace never slowing down. There’s no itch under his skin. No fire burning in his gut. It almost feels routine, lacklustre and boring.

“I d-don’t feel bad for her at all,” she responds. “You wouldn’t be here with me if she knew how to satisfy you. Must be a boring prude.”

Something splinters in Taehyung’s brain.

Suddenly, his cool demeanour snaps into something feral. He slaps her across the face, hard enough to bruise. She startles, a scream leaving her lips as Taehyung winds his long fingers into her hair and tugs, a few strands ripping out.

“And you think you can satisfy me, huh? With this sloppy cunt?” he demands, lips spreading into a sneer. “You better shut that dumb fucking mouth of yours before I knock your teeth out.”

He caresses the hand shaped mark on the side of her face, bright red, then starts to harshly smear her makeup all over her face.

“Look at this cheap fucking makeup,” he mocks. “You aren’t even an iota as pretty as Jimin is.”

She’s trying to scrabble away, overcome with tears and fear, but it doesn’t work with his weight over hers.

“I’ll tell you why I’m here with you,” he says, voice but a whisper as he leans in to speak into her ear. She’s crying now, trembling. “I’m here with you because I wanted to get my dick wet. Not because I fell in love with you back at the shop, but because the first thing I saw when I looked at you was an easy whore. Don’t you ever talk about Jimin that way, you stupid slut.”

He raises his hand to pretend that he’s going to hit her again and laughs gregariously when she flinches. He does it again, over and over, just to see the way she squeezes her eyes shut

and whimpers with fear each time. And then finally, he slaps her once more, her head swinging to the side with the force of it.

After that, he pulls out, gets off of her and lays down onto his back, watching as she scrambles off the bed and gathers her clothes, sobbing uncontrollably. She yanks them on, buttons off and skirt torn, and flees from the room. He lets her go, chuckling to himself.

Taehyung stays for a while. He takes a shower, leisurely using the nice bath gel and hot water. He orders room service (it's one of the better motels) and watches some television. He enjoys the sitcom that's running, laughing loudly at all the jokes.

He leaves after the 3 hours he'd paid for is up, getting into his car and driving away with Jimin's pristine gift tucked into the back seat.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the first official chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 2: Low Hanging Fruit

Chapter Notes

Here's the second chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

Beautiful moodboard made by Ina (cappuccinokyu) <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Applying to colleges is easy. Taehyung's got okay grades, but it's his sports and extracurriculars that really seem to shape his character in the eyes of the judging committee. He's the picture-perfect candidate for a top university, born in a stable family with parents who are both well-to-do surgeons, focusing on studying, martial arts and sports. Getting into medical school will be a breeze, especially also considering the generous donation his parents plan to make to the university that accepts him. They are well known across the industry, and Taehyung has applied to both of the medical schools his parents studied at to boost the chance of a legacy acceptance.

It's an easy career choice. His parents own a hospital specializing in neurology, the only major one available for several smaller cities in this part of the country. It means that money flows like water for them, and there's no dearth of patients. Taehyung will take over, and he won't have to worry about working his way up.

Taehyung's good with words. That's how he's been able to build his social life after all. He's good at spinning stories and carefully piecing together a picture that's easy to believe. He paints a whole story about his valiant persona in his statement of purpose, about how becoming a surgeon and following his parents' footsteps and saving lives has always been his dream, and discretely sits for entrance exams that he's actually put in some effort to study for.

He has his eyes set on KU. It's got a nice sprawling campus, and a decent party culture. Lots of amenities for his swimming and martial arts. It's perfect. He doesn't tell anyone where he's applying to, instead acting aloof and undecided when the topic of colleges inevitably comes up in conversation.

Everyone's talking about the fact that a year from now, they'll all be in different parts of the country, or maybe even the world. Mingyu's applying to a university in Australia, because he has family there who he can live with and save money. There are lots of plans to make the most of their final senior year before it ends, cherish the time they have left.

Taehyung won't admit it, but he'll be sad to leave their little town. He was born here, and has lived his entire life here thus far. He likes the life he's cultivated for himself here. And there's also something sad about leaving Jimin behind. It makes growing up seem more real, and it's

almost like he predicts he'll outgrow the other boy. He doesn't think it's possible, but he wonders if the concept of Jimin will lose its lustre once they're apart. Will Taehyung's attention be swayed by big city girls and endless opportunities, and will he start to find Jimin childish and too juvenile? Too simple? A puerile past to be rid of.

Jimin's got a pop quiz tomorrow, so his phone is turned off. He'd told Taehyung about it the previous day, that he'd be switching his phone off because if he has it on, he'll end up spending the whole day texting him rather than studying for his test. Jimin's going to be here for one more year, living his silly every day for another 365 sunrises and sunsets. He's just a year younger than Taehyung, but at that age, the gap in maturity and naivete is immense.

Taehyung looks at Jimin's cute contact picture in the messaging app. It's him holding a cup of coffee to his mouth, showing off the latte art. His upper lip is streaked with foam and he's laughing, and the picture has one of those sepia filters over it and a smiley sticker in the corner. He imagines Jimin editing this picture and happily uploading it. He also wonders who else is seeing this picture. Jimin doesn't really have any friends. Taehyung hopes not too many people are looking at it. Not because it isn't cute, but because he doesn't like the idea of people looking at Jimin the way he does. Last year for his birthday, Jimin celebrated with his family and only met Taehyung that weekend for a romantic lunch. That's when he first realized that Jimin liked spaghetti, thinking back to how happy he looked as their food arrived. Something tugs his heart at the memory.

Taehyung realizes that outgrowing Jimin might end up being a harder task than he'd initially thought.

Me: baby

Me: i miss you

The message doesn't deliver. He imagines Jimin biting at the end of his pen, studying hard by his desk. He's watched Jimin study before, and he's always adorable, mouthing the words he reads silently, slim ankles always crossed. Taehyung likes looking at Jimin's wrists and ankles, wrapping his fingers around them. They're pretty. He's pretty. That's what drew him to him in the first place.

The night passes, and Jimin doesn't respond at all.

-

Taehyung's busy at school, so he doesn't have time to keep an eye out for Jimin. He had to travel to a local university for a match and has to skip class for sessions with his college counsellors more often than not.

But what's odd is the fact that Jimin hasn't texted Taehyung in 3 days. He usually receives 6 texts from Jimin an hour. There are the long paragraphs of typo-riddled messages about his day that Taehyung never bothers to read, and there are the cute selfies and the random chat stickers he sends when he wants attention but doesn't want to explicitly say it. None of that. The last chat history they have is when Taehyung heart reacted to Jimin's good morning selfie 3 days ago.

When he calls, Jimin's phone is switched off.

Taehyung frowns at his phone where he stands in the locker room, leaning back against his locker. The cool metal soothes his naked back, a thick towel sat loosely around his hips. Jimin doesn't have cram school today either, so why won't he respond?

"What's gotten into you?"

Taehyung looks up to see Hyungsoo pulling on his clothes, having just showered too. It's been a long day of practice, and the sky's dark outside.

"Nothing," Taehyung answers blankly, locking his phone and starting to change too. He pulls on his sweats and loose tee and beelines straight for his car that's in the parking lot outside, not wanting to stay behind and horse around with his friends.

On the way to Jimin's house, his mind runs.

What if Jimin knows everything? What if someone told him that Taehyung has cheated on him countless times, and has never been serious about dating even for a second? What if he

knows Taehyung restored the video? What if he knows about all the other videos too, or the fact that Taehyung beat up the one friend Jimin almost had and bullied him into transferring schools?

Taehyung clenches his jaw, knuckles white where they grip the smooth leather of the steering wheel. He's feeling antsy, his leg shaking, the vehicle inching up over the speed limit. He's barely present for pulling into his usual parking spot and hopping Jimin's fence, desperate in the way he scales his way up to his room.

Jimin's studying inside, and he jumps in his chair when he hears someone clambering over the ledge of his balcony. The moment he sees Taehyung, he runs over to him and whispers furiously, eyes wide.

"T-Tae!" he yells, or mouths, rather. "You have to leave!"

"Why?" Taehyung questions, gripping Jimin's shoulders and ushering the two of them into the room. He walks to Jimin's door and turns the lock.

"I-"

"Why haven't you been answering my messages or calls?" Taehyung demands, although he's mostly calm because Jimin doesn't seem upset with him.

"Yoongi hyung took my phone away," Jimin says around a pout.

"What? Why?"

"Because he saw that gift you gave me…the lingerie. I'm a b-bad liar, Tae, I couldn't lie to him."

Taehyung's blood runs cold.

“He knows about us?” he asks, voice stable yet dropping a few octaves. He should’ve been more careful, he supposes. The last time he’d come over here, he’d brought the gift with him because he was too impatient to wait for the next time they could meet at his place. Jimin must’ve put it in his closet, and he’s also told Taehyung before about how Yoongi is in charge of laundry-

“Oh my god, no!” Jimin clarifies. “I tried to tell him that I bought it for myself, but he didn’t believe me because he knew I would never be able to afford something like that. And he saw the card you wrote too. He saw the collar and everything, it was so embarrassing!”

“So he took away your phone?” Taehyung asks, eyebrows furrowing. How dare he?

“And grounded me,” Jimin pouts. “He thinks that there’s some creep taking advantage of me! He took my phone to check my messages, but don’t worry, I deleted our chats and muted your contact before he could see!”

“Good boy,” Taehyung commends, and the praise sends a heated blush to Jimin’s cheeks. The other boy hugs him tightly.

“I missed you so much, Tae.”

“I missed you too.”

“It was so scary,” Jimin whines into his t-shirt. “He kept yelling at me about how I shouldn’t be having sex, and not to trust older men. He says that they’re just out to take advantage of me. And the entire time I just wanted to shout that it was Taehyung, his friend, who loves me! It’s so not *fair*. Hyung has had girlfriends before so why can’t I have a boyfriend?”

It slams into Taehyung then. Just how naive and gullible Jimin is. He looks down at the other boy, drinking up the way he stares at him with wide, besotted eyes. So completely trusting, so sure that the reality he lives is the truth. His cheeks and nose are pink with distress, eyes steadily growing wet.

Taehyung forces himself out of his thoughts, the shred of hesitation he was feeling quickly engulfed by rage.

“How dare he ground you? Who does he think he is?” Taehyung seethes.

“If I thought there was a creepy old man going after my hyung I’d be upset too,” Jimin reasons softly. “But I hate how he just assumed that!”

“He’s an idiot, that’s why.”

Jimin’s quiet for a few seconds, and then pulls away from the embrace.

“Don’t talk about my hyung like that,” he says, voice subdued. “He isn’t an idiot. He’s just worried about me.”

There it is again. The defiance.

“So you’ll pick him over me?” he demands, voice steely cold the way it gets when he’s really angry. “If Yoongi asked you to break up with me, you would?”

“Tae, he’s my brother-”

“Answer the fucking question.”

Jimin flinches back, shrinking slightly. Still, he responds.

“Why are you getting mad at me? Neither of us meant for this to happen, you’re scaring me-”

“You have any idea how much I’ve sacrificed to be your boyfriend, Jimin? I have to lie to my parents, friends and all these girls everyday. They all think I’m single, and despite everything, I’ve never been anything but faithful to you. I fight to keep this secret, to make time for you every single day.”

Tears well up in Jimin’s eyes.

“And it hurts that you’ll just give up on us because Yoongi wants you to.”

“I won’t give up! I love you! I stopped him from finding out, didn’t I? I didn’t pick anyone.”

“But if you could’ve picked, you’d have picked Yoongi.”

“So you’re saying that you’d pick me over your parents? My family and boyfriend are two different types of relationships-”

Taehyung grabs Jimin who was in the middle of turning around to sit on his bed, cutting him off and yanking him toward him harshly. The other boy flinches, eyes widening.

“I don’t like this new attitude problem you’ve developed,” Taehyung warns, tone low. “You keep talking back to me.”

Jimin frowns, mouth dropping open. He tenses under his grip.

“Tae, what? I-”

“Tell me that you love me more than Yoongi.”

Jimin's silent, staring at him. It seems he knows not to bother with responding because Taehyung will just cut him off again.

"Say it."

"I love you more than Yoongi. Happy?" Jimin quips, clearly frustrated.

Taehyung beams, pulling him into a warm hug. He kisses Jimin's hair, swaying with him slightly. Jimin doesn't return the embrace until after a few seconds later, nosing at his shoulder. Taehyung knows how much Jimin loves him, and how to pull the strings to his sappy, cliche-riddled, emotionally reliant heart. It's difficult not to take advantage of it sometimes.

"I hope next week I won't be grounded anymore," Jimin says. "I'll promise Yoongi not to talk to the creepy old men he thinks I'm talking to. He won't push me for names if I don't want to tell him."

"Okay."

"Are you still angry?"

"I don't think so," Taehyung answers. "Not at you. As long as I know that you put me first, just as I put you first everyday."

"I don't like fighting with you…" Jimin says softly, a smidge sad. "We don't fight very often."

"No, we don't. You're right," Taehyung agrees, rubbing his back. He kisses his forehead, holding him close. The sun sets outside, bathing Jimin's room in its peachy glow.

“But...”

“Hmm?”

“When you grabbed me just now, it hurt. And you really scared me. I thought you were going to hit me for a second.”

Taehyung stares at him, jaw clenched.

Was he going to hit him? Did the thought cross his mind? He doesn’t even remember. His brain does that sometimes; black out when he’s angry or is feeling too many things all at once.

“I wasn’t going to hit you,” he says, settling on a response because he knew he was taking too long. “I would never do that.”

Jimin stares at him warily. His eyes are wet in a way that if they were still fighting, he would be crying right now.

“I’m sorry that I hurt you,” Taehyung offers then, lifting Jimin’s arm and kissing the skin over where he’d grabbed him. There’s already a purpling bruise. “I just got so-”

“It’s fine,” Jimin says softly, and it seems he’s eager to end this conversation. Taehyung brings a hand up and thumbs at his plush bottom lip.

“I’m sorry,” he repeats. It feels like there’s a dark cloud over them, and Taehyung’s desperate to get rid of it. Jimin’s never been upset with him before. And part of him is honestly surprised. There’d been many times in the past where Taehyung had knowingly crossed a line, and Jimin hadn’t said a word. Perhaps he just took those instances to mean that Jimin would be okay with anything he did. It puts some things into perspective, and it’s an uncomfortable revelation that Taehyung isn’t very happy with. It’s almost like adopting a dog

thinking that it's trained and domesticated and then finding out that it really isn't. Sends a lot of things careening off course. A previously checked box now turned bare.

Jimin gives him a small smile, but it's not all there. Still, he returns the kiss Taehyung presses to his lips.

It's a little awkward after that. In a way that things between them have never been. Jimin now seems to be averse to touching, and Taehyung, for the first time, is reluctant to push his buttons. They silently watch a movie on Jimin's laptop with 2 feet of distance in between them, and Jimin's hand stiffens when Taehyung places his over it. When Taehyung looks at him, Jimin's eyes are on the screen but they seem distant. His posture is stiff, and his breathing is short.

But when Taehyung gets up to leave around dinner time, Jimin asks him to stay. And his words bleed the need to have him close despite the rift. He tells him that Yoongi feels guilty for yelling so he wouldn't come by and check on him, so Taehyung can stay the night.

Taehyung does stay. They watch more movies until they decide to sleep, and Jimin shuffles closer until they're on the same pillow. It's one of the few nights they're spending together without sex. Taehyung watches him as he sleeps, unable to truly drift away himself without some medication. It's one of those days. There's a deep anxiety ringing through him. Jimin was upset with him. Enough so to not want to touch for a few hours. Is he not as under his thumb as he thought? It's almost like he can't comprehend that Jimin can display emotions other than love and admiration toward him.

"I'm sorry," Taehyung whispers in his ear, even if he doesn't quite mean it, eager to move past this phase. Somehow, he doesn't feel in control anymore.

Jimin doesn't respond, but he squeezes his hand. Taehyung pulls him closer. Jimin stiffens. Their chests are pressed together. Taehyung can feel Jimin's heart rattling in his ribcage, the shallow breaths he's taking. He's afraid.

Taehyung strokes his fingers through Jimin's hair, and he seems to calm down. His breathing evens out, and his fingers stop trembling. Eventually, he falls asleep.

The next morning, things are back to normal. The bruises on Jimin's arm are darker.

-

Yoongi gets into KAIST.

It's in Daejeon, about an hour from Seoul and 3 hours away from their town. It's a massive deal. It's the best university in their country for science, and he's one of the 2 students in their batch to have gotten in. The teachers are talking about it, his classmates are talking about it. Yoongi just attends his classes like usual, as if his life wasn't set the moment he'd gotten the acceptance letter. Taehyung thinks about how Yoongi will probably get a high flying job once he graduates, and will live the rest of his life in a posh home, unlike the standard lower middle class house his family lives in now.

Taehyung's still awaiting his own application results. It's that time of year, where everyone awaits dates to check online portals or expects envelopes in their mailboxes. A nerve wracking, nail-biting mood has long since blanketed his class.

Mingyu got into his Australian university. Taehyung's done his research on where he's going. It's an unknown college with little to no influence in international rankings, nor is it reputed. It seems that Mingyu's parents fell into the common trap that most Asian parents do: do whatever it takes to give their child a foreign education, even if they'd be much better off staying at home. Taehyung thinks it's pitiful, and scoffs when Mingyu announces a celebratory party at his house later that evening. What is he celebrating, exactly? Gaining a mediocre degree that won't get him anywhere neither there nor here in South Korea?

He watches as their friend group swarms around Mingyu, congratulating him and teasing him about Australian girls.

And all the while, Yoongi silently wraps his knuckles with protective bandaging at the other end of the locker room. He's started to get into boxing too, but not so much that it'll affect his practice time for Taekwondo. More as a way to diversify and freshen up his extracurriculars. Looking at him, you wouldn't think that he was dealing with policing his younger brother at home, attempting to curb his recently uncovered and already rampant sex life. All this while, Yoongi probably assumed that there was very little to Jimin's life other than watching dramas and collecting washi tapes, enjoying trips to the movies and cool new cafes.

Yoongi stands up eventually and leaves the locker room, heading to the practice room where a boxing bag probably awaits.

Taehyung follows.

It's stark, the space. It's barely breaking dusk, and the dwindling sunlight that shines through the window highlights the specks of dust floating through the air. Right in the centre is Yoongi getting into stance before the boxing bag, and he doesn't look at Taehyung as he speaks.

"What do you want?"

"Are you coming to Mingyu's party tonight?" Taehyung asks, although the answer is obvious.

Yoongi scoffs.

"No."

"Why not?"

"If you've got nothing important to talk about, leave," Yoongi says, landing his first hit into the bag. It swings back, the blow loud in the empty room. "I don't have time for this."

"Why'd you stop hanging out with us?" Taehyung asks.

"I don't like you guys. I'm not gonna spend any more time with you than I already have to."

“You wound me, Yoongi,” Taehyung chuckles. “We’re not *that* bad-”

“You’re a bunch of fucking predators, who should be locked up in prison,” Yoongi states rather calmly. “I’m not going to hang out with people who don’t have respect for anyone but themselves.”

Taehyung leans against the wall, picking at his nails. The words do little to affect him. Nothing he doesn’t already know.

“Prison would suck,” he responds anyway, pouting. “No more pussy to drown in.”

“I feel sorry for whoever’s gonna end up with you.”

It’ll be your little brother, who gags on my cock every second he’s not sitting on it.

Taehyung smirks. It would be so easy to just say it. To just say it and shatter Yoongi’s view of the world, and this self-built throne he’s seated himself on.

“Spar with me,” Taehyung proposes then. Yoongi pauses. “Spar with me. Like the old days.”

The truth is, Taehyung has been training. And there’s a part of him that wants to deal some damage. Because Yoongi’s somehow always had the upper hand. They met when they were 14, in their local Taekwondo gym. Taehyung was a prodigy until Yoongi enrolled and overtook him in every way possible. They were barely friends for a little while, would interact mostly when their team would have dinners in McDonalds after matches and the like. Typical childhood acquaintance. But they did get along for the most part. Their interests quickly diversified when Taehyung became more invested in swimming.and studies became more serious. And then they enrolled in the same high school years later.

Yoongi’s the type of boy girls trust to walk them home, or to be around when they’re drunk. He doesn’t objectify women, and is miles ahead of the rest of them in terms of maturity. His thoughts aren’t routed through his dick. It’s why he immediately isolated himself from their

friend group, the typical one that forms due to sports camaraderie. And Taehyung didn't really care. Let Yoongi be his self-righteous, unbearable self. It had nothing to do with him. Taehyung was better at swimming. They had their core competencies, neither was inherently better than the other.

But if Yoongi is going to keep Jimin from him, and make it difficult for Taehyung to get his fix, he's not going to let that slide. Yoongi being better at Taekwondo somehow starts to rub salt into wounds now suddenly apparent.

"Nah," Yoongi shrugs.

"C'mon," Taehyung goads. "Scared?"

Yoongi chuckles. It isn't a nervous one. It's the type of chuckle that betrays that he already knows the outcome, no room to consider that Taehyung might win.

"I don't fight amateurs, Kim," Yoongi answers then, finally turning to look at him. "If you're looking to feed your ego the way you usually are, I suggest you find a way that won't land you with a possible injury."

Taehyung's blood boils. Yoongi knows he's not an amateur, they've been training for the same amount of years. He's just saying it to get a rise out of him, and it's working. Taehyung doesn't let it show.

"I think you'll be surprised by the end result."

Yoongi raises an eyebrow. He then steps away from the boxing bag, turning to face Taehyung completely.

"Alright."

Taehyung smirks. There's no equipment. No helmets, no rubber mats, and no mouthguards. If they fight, it'll get bloody.

He steps forward, and Yoongi moves to the centre of the room. The other boy gets into stance, and fixes Taehyung a look.

"Let's do this."

Taehyung's been studying Yoongi's fighting style. He doesn't have much brawn, which means that while he's agile, he's more prone to being tackled to the ground. Taehyung's going to go for his stomach. If he kicks him hard enough there, he'd send Yoongi falling faster than he can blink. The mere thought of it makes him giddy, and he almost wishes Jimin was seated on a chair in the same room to watch them, so he could see how much better Taehyung is than his precious Yoongi.

Taehyung gets into stance too, and the fight starts. He doesn't go for it immediately, and Yoongi doesn't attack first, just calmly blocks Taehyung's weak attacks that are mostly just set up to catch him off guard for the rough kick. It's almost like Yoongi's holding back, which infuriates Taehyung further. Taehyung aims for his shins, but Yoongi darts out of the line each time, as if able to read Taehyung's mind and anticipate his attacks. His defences don't slacken, and he doesn't give Taehyung the window he needs to take him down.

Slowly, Taehyung starts to get frustrated. And it's what his coach frequently warns him about too. Taehyung has a temper, and it's no secret. He's good at fighting, but he's quick to lose control and snap if things don't go the way he wants them to.

Taehyung's good, but Yoongi's better.

It goes on this way, and when he thinks that it's the perfect time to strike, he does.

When he attempts to land the kick, he's blindsided in less than a second. Yoongi's foot darts out and turbo kicks him upside the chin, and he feels the blow in his skull. He barely registers falling to the ground, and the metallic tang of blood in his mouth. His head is spinning, and he's lucky that he didn't bite his tongue.

He’s lost. As easy as that.

Yoongi stands above him, and holds out a hand to help him up to his feet. Taehyung sees red.

He grabs Yoongi’s shins and tackles him to the ground. It’s against the rules, but he’s beyond caring. He moves to punch Yoongi across the face, his lips spread into a bloody grin.

Yoongi dodges, and Taehyung’s eyes widen.

Yoongi’s knee comes up to kick him in the nuts, and his fist darts out to punch him in the throat, and then his nose in rapid succession. Taehyung’s suddenly on his back again, and he’s overwhelmed by Yoongi’s core strength. He’s gasping for breath, and Yoongi manhandles him into a chokehold. He can feel blood trickling out his nose and down his chin.

“You play dirty, you’re gonna pay the price,” Yoongi spits in his ear. “I saw you coming from a mile away.”

Taehyung takes in ragged breaths, shaking with anger. He can’t take defeat. And he’s never had to until now. It’s been years since Yoongi last bested him. He thought it’d be different.

“I’m not someone you can push around, Kim. Put a lid on that temper or you’ll never get better,” Yoongi says before releasing him and standing onto his feet. He doesn’t offer to help Taehyung up this time.

Yoongi walks back to his boxing bag and continues his practice, not a single scratch on him. Taehyung’s mouth and nose are bloody and his body aches. He genuinely feels like doesn’t know what just happened. And it’s always like that with Yoongi, ever since they used to practise together as kids. Yoongi’s too fast, and he fights hard.

Taehyung lays on the floor until his head stops spinning. He wants to throw up. He can hear the sounds of the boxing bag getting punched, and the breeze from the open window makes the sweat and blood on his skin congeal.

Eventually, Yoongi finishes up and heads out. Leaving Taehyung right there on the floor.

Taehyung sits up after a while, and it's nightfall now. When he moves his jaw, there's a shooting pain up the side of his face. Slowly, he gets up and stands on shaky legs. He's quick to bring his fingers up to his nose and right the fracture, gritting his teeth as he does.

He walks back to the locker room, and he finds himself stopping in front of Yoongi's locker. He punches the lock, enough times for it to break, uncaring of the blood dripping down his arm. It swings open, hanging precariously off its hinges. Inside, it's nice and neat. Toiletries, spare towels, emergency cash, basic first aid. Organized and immaculate.

And then, there's a picture of Yoongi and Jimin from one of his matches, Jimin leaning over from the audience seats to hug him tightly, both of them smiling into the camera.

Taehyung blacks out. All he can sense are the shockwaves up his bones with each collision, the way his heart pounds so hard he can't hear the sounds of metal caving in.

When he comes to, Yoongi's locker tower is lying diagonally on the floor, and it's damaged beyond repair. The cheap metal's bruised and cracked open, dented in, the door thrown off its hinges. Yoongi's toiletries lay destroyed on the floor, cash crushed beyond repair, first aid box broken to bits. The picture is unrecognizable, torn and ripped with what looks like could've been his teeth.

Somehow, Jimin's pretty face seems to have survived, in a messy hexagon that Taehyung picks up and puts in his pocket.

Taehyung then calmly walks over to his own locker, although he's limping slightly. His throat is sore as if he'd been screaming. When he opens it, he doesn't notice the way the little door is bathed with blood where he holds it. He picks up his phone.

There are a number of notifications.

The first he sees is an email.

It's an acceptance letter. He's gotten into KU.

Taehyung stares at the alphabets and words that make up the contents of the email. He'd gotten it during the fight. He doesn't know why he isn't feeling anything. Where's the unparalleled gratification he was expecting, and should be experiencing?

And then, he sees the messages.

Minnie: Tae!!

Minnie: ٩(◕‿◕)۶

Minnie: I got my phone back c: Hyung gave it back to me last night. Sorry for not messaging sooner I had class all day and then cram school >.< just finished all my homework too. wanna see youuuuuuuu

Minnie: taetaetaetaetaetaetaetaetaetaetaetaetaetae

Minnie: (`ε´)

Taehyung smiles lightly, and it's like his frigid heart opens up a little. There's a sudden warmth that spreads down to his fingers. He has a sudden urge to see Jimin, and his initial plans of going to Mingyu's party and finding another faceless lay evaporate into the haze of his mind.

Me: I'm going to pick you up right now.

Me: Be there in 15

Minnie: ヽ(°◯°)ﾉ

Minnie: ok!!!!

Taehyung leaves for his car, and the school is empty. There's no one around. The sleek vehicle's parked close to the school gates, tucked neatly into a spot that everyone knows is his.

He gets in, turns on the engine and starts driving.

When he pulls up in the lane behind Jimin's house, the other boy is already waiting for him out on the street. He has the biggest smile on his face, a cute backpack on his shoulders. He's bouncing on his heels, and heads straight for the passenger door the moment Taehyung slows to a stop in front of him.

Jimin pulls open the door, and when he sees Taehyung, the first thing he does is dart back with a small shout. He brings his small hands forward to cover his mouth.

"T-Tae!" he exclaims with alarm. "What happened to you?"

Taehyung frowns.

"What do you mean? Get in."

"Look at yourself in the mirror! You're really hurt! We should go to a hospital-"

Taehyung pulls down the sunshield and sees his reflection. His eyes are crazed, hair all over the place. There's tacky blood all over his mouth and down his nose, careening down his throat and staining the front of his shirt. The edge of his jaw has a nasty bruise.

“Fuck,” he curses when he realizes that the steering wheel is sticky with dried blood. He’d already showered before he challenged Yoongi, and he forgot that he probably needed to after. The pain in his jaw has now devolved to numbness, and his knuckles are barely recognizable.

“What happened?” Jimin repeats, finally getting into the car. He’s frantic, fussing over him. “Did you get into a fight? Who did this to you? Let’s report them-”

“I have good news. And I want to celebrate with you,” Taehyung cuts in. He leans over and closes Jimin’s car door for him, going so far as to buckle him in. “You in to stay the night with me?”

Jimin’s mouth clamps shut. He knows better than to prod, not when Taehyung obviously skirts around a topic. After a few seconds, he nods, although he seems wary.

“I’ll tell hyung I’m doing study group-”

“Do you ever shut up about your fucking hyung?” Taehyung snaps, and the car almost shakes with how he raises his voice. There’s a buzzing under his skin.

It’s eerily silent for a few seconds after.

When he looks at Jimin, the boy’s staring at him with wide eyes. The moment their gazes meet, hot tears spill out of his lash line.

“Oh, baby,” Taehyung softens. It’s not Jimin’s fault after all. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to yell,” he consoles, pulling Jimin into a hug. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” he whispers into his ear, over and over.

Jimin sniffles against his shirt, and his chest is trembling. His pristine yellow t-shirt gets streaked with blood where Taehyung rubs his back.

Taehyung pulls away, and he looks Jimin in the eyes.

“I’m sorry for yelling,” he repeats, voice slow and stable to calm him down. “I’ve just had a rough day. Okay?”

Jimin doesn’t respond, although he’s still sniffling.

“Wanna hear something nice?” Taehyung adds. “I got into med school at KU.”

Jimin’s eyes widen further and then he smiles.

“Really?” he asks, face lighting up although he’s still crying. He’s a pitiful sight.

“Yeah,” Taehyung answers, gliding his thumbs over Jimin’s pretty cheekbones and catching the fat tears.

“Congratulations,” Jimin says then, sounding much more alive. He hugs Taehyung. “I’m so proud of you.”

Taehyung kisses the side of his head, somehow finally feeling happy about the news after seeing Jimin’s reaction.

“How about we go to mine, and I’ll take a well needed shower, huh?” Taehyung suggests, leaning in to brush their noses together and smiling when Jimin giggles. “And then I’ll take you out for spaghetti and we can watch a movie at home all cuddled up after?”

Jimin nods shakily.

“Sounds nice? Tell me.”

“Y-Yeah.”

Taehyung kisses him lightly, then pecks his nose before starting the car and driving away. He places his hand on Jimin’s thigh for the duration of the ride, stroking the bits of supple skin that peek out of his ripped jeans. Not something Taehyung’s seen him wear before. They’re probably a new pair.

When they stop at a signal, Taehyung notices Jimin staring at his knuckles. The flesh is torn and raw, mottled blue where it’s intact.

“I’m fine,” Taehyung says.

“No, you’re not,” Jimin responds softly. And somehow, even though in that moment the words reference the injury, it feels connected to a deeper facet of their reality.

It’s silent for the rest of the ride.

When they reach Taehyung’s house, he coaxes Jimin into joining him for the shower. They predictably end up having sex during, and Taehyung fucks Jimin the way he likes. The other boy likes being made to feel small, and Taehyung likes feeling big, so he holds Jimin up against the thick glass wall of his shower chamber and pounds into him so hard he can’t hold onto a single thought. The hot water scalds his unhealed wounds, but it’s a secondary sensation. And the sex, it’s like it always is. Blowing off steam, wearing down the heavy weight in his chest to something high and addictive.

Neither of them talks about the blood swirling down the drain in crimson rivulets.

“You’re lighter,” Taehyung comments, voice rough. His fingers tense where they hold Jimin up with firm grips on his ass.

“I’m doing this d-detox diet I saw online,” Jimin answers, his voice pitching cutely. His thick thighs are wound around his waist, arms wrapped around his shoulders. Taehyung’s addicted to the choked little moans punched out of him with every thrust.

“Why’re you dieting, baby?” Taehyung prods, gritting his teeth as he starts to fuck him harder. The hot water rains down his back, and the steam is making him dizzy. His bathroom is large, all dark granite tiles and dim lighting.

“It’s for my s-skin, mostly, but I-”

Taehyung shuts up him with a searing hot kiss, pulling at his bottom lip with his teeth. He hoists Jimin up higher, starting to slam him into him so hard his head knocks back against the glass wall with every thrust of his hips. Jimin gasps, scrabbling at his back. He starts to writhe in his hold, thighs quivering.

“T-Tae, ‘m gonna cum-”

Taehyung just fucks him hard enough till he does, and then uses Jimin’s body to chase his own pleasure. This is always his favourite part, and it’s why he always makes Jimin cum before he does. Jimin when driven to oversensitivity is impossible to resist; he makes these pretty little noises and squirms and clenches and it’s just perfect. His face and skin is all a deep splotchy pink from the steam, glowing.

Taehyung cums with gritted teeth, hips slamming against Jimin’s as he rides it out. The moment the stars behind his eyes dissipate and the waves of euphoria start to cease, he tenderly pulls out of Jimin and sets him back onto his feet, slowly so that he won’t slip on the wet floor. He’s clumsier than most, unfortunately. Jimin’s got jelly legs, knees quivering and on the verge of buckling as soon as his feet touch the tiled floor.

“My thigh is still shaking,” Jimin marvels. “It feels funny.”

“Yeah?” Taehyung asks, leaning in to kiss his swollen lips. The other boy has that spaced out look in his eyes again, cloudy and far away. Taehyung brings a hand down to caress his left

thigh, smiling when he feels the endearing way it tremors lightly. “That’s because I fucked you so good.”

Jimin hums. “It was amazing.”

Taehyung’s ego inflates, slightly overriding the immense drought he’d been feeling earlier in the day. He wonders if Jimin is an antidote to all of his problems. Nothing quite works like his presence does.

Jimin then grabs the bottle of shower gel and squeezes some into his small palm, lathering it and applying it over Taehyung’s body.

His eyes widen.

“You’re hurt, let me do it for you,” Jimin says softly.

Taehyung lets him.

Jimin scrubs the gentle foam into his skin, massaging his back and shoulders too. Then, he grabs the shampoo and stretches up to rub it into his scalp. Taehyung’s eyes fall shut, giving into the special treatment. He feels the little balls of stress under his skin melt away, knots coming loose. His brain starts to unravel slightly, the edges of it expanding and growing floaty.

Then, Jimin rinses him off with warm water, making sure the temperature isn’t too hot so it won’t irritate the wounds on his hands. After that, he takes care of himself. And Taehyung watches keenly, eyes following the way Jimin gently rubs the soap into his own skin, turning to cover every inch of his narrow back. It feels so domestic, so alien. He’s suddenly entranced with the way the suds spread as Jimin’s fingers move over his supple skin, lathering generously. The way even the simple action of him bathing himself ignites arousal in Taehyung, his cock twitching as he watches the soap sheen over his ass.

“I wish I could get you pregnant,” Taehyung declares, his mouth running loose, miles ahead of his brain.

Jimin pauses, turning to look at him funnily as he toggles the showerhead on. “What?” he laughs, disbelieving.

It’s not entirely true. He doesn’t mean it in the sense that he wishes Jimin had a sparkling solitaire on his ring finger, and that they lived together in a home destined for their baby to grow in. That they’d build a nursery together and go to expensive shops and pick out cribs and little shoes and little onesies and little socks. That they’d cuddle and Taehyung would press an ear to his baby bump to hear the little one kick. That they’d kiss after and talk about what life with the baby would be like through sweet whispers.

He means it in the sense that he wants to leave a lasting impact. It would be interesting to see Jimin’s body distended, knowing that it’s because of him. That he’d give up 9 months of his life for Taehyung, weighed down and trapped by his side. He’d probably have to drop out of school. Helpless and big and emotionally vulnerable. Waddling around and pouting about aching feet and a relentless libido. Reliant on Taehyung in every way possible. He’d never leave his side, and he’d be his property. And Taehyung, he’d be free to do whatever he wanted. He doesn’t want the baby, just the process and lasting aftereffects.

It’s impossible, and Taehyung thinks that Jimin should thank his lucky stars.

“Just joking,” Taehyung clarifies, watching as the other boy gets clean. Jimin rolls his eyes playfully, bringing his hands up to rinse the shampoo out of his hair. Taehyung unabashedly watches the way the water trickles down his smooth skin, the way the steam acts as a hazy backdrop to the smooth curves of his body. Time seems to go by syrupy slow.

Taehyung doesn’t remember much of the rest of the evening, and most of his thoughts revolve around the future, babies he doesn’t want and the increasingly appealing idea of shackles.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the second chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 3: Always Forever

Chapter Notes

Here's the third chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

Beautiful moodboard made by Ina (cappuccinokyu) <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The months seem to pass slowly and then suddenly all at once. It's jarring when his mother suddenly brings up the question of whether Taehyung would like to live in the university dorm or off campus in his own apartment. He says that he'll decide later. She then tells him that there are only 3 months before he graduates high school, and that they're already discussing this too late.

Taehyung, obviously, chooses his own apartment. It's a one bedroom that's a short walk from his university but is still close to Seoul's biggest party and nightlife districts. His parents have even hired a cook and a maid to come clean and do his laundry.

His parents aren't strict, not in the slightest. He's never ever been given a curfew, or a spending limit, no concern regarding any aspect of his life beyond his academics. Still, it makes him giddy. The thought of having his own space for him to do whatever he wants.

Taehyung boasts about his apartment in the locker room. It's one of those carefree evenings after practice that are starting to feel scarce, moreso now that they know their time here is steadily growing limited.

"Man, you're so fucking lucky," Hyungsoo groans, looking at the pictures of the apartment on Taehyung's phone. The realtor sent them to him a few hours ago. It's all modern lighting and wide spaces, the bathroom contemporary with brand new tiles. "I'm gonna have to shack up with my extended family. And help out with shifts at their restaurant."

Taehyung laughs. "You're welcome to visit anytime."

"Heh. As if. I know you, you're gonna have bitches over all the time. Don't wanna walk in and catch you with your dick out."

"You'd be privileged," Taehyung chuckles, picking up his bag and shutting his locker. His eyes drift to the new shiny locker across the room that replaced Yoongi's destroyed one. Somehow, no one ever spoke about the damage. Yoongi just stopped training with the rest of them, instead of opting to go to the gym they used to frequent when they were younger. He hasn't seen the other boy in weeks.

Taehyung heads home, and he starts to think about his life. Time flies by so quickly. Faster than he can admit. In just 3 months, he'll be in a different city living a different life, surrounded by completely different people. It's a thought process that can drive most down the route to anxiety, but it thrills Taehyung. New people and experiences for him to sink his teeth into. That's what it all means to him. Life is always for having fun and making sure you're always on top.

Taehyung arrives home rather quickly. He parks his car in the spacious garage and takes the stairs two at a time to his room. The moment he enters, he has the sudden urge to clean it up.

Taehyung hangs away clothes strewn over the floor and flings an unrecognizable bra into the trash bin. He wipes down his dusty study table that he hasn't been bothered to sit at for a while now. When he's rifling through the loose documents on the shelves, he comes across a sheet of paper from 2 years ago.

Dear Taehyung,

I'd like to start off by saying that I'm really sorry for how I reacted that night. I wasn't expecting you to kiss me. It's been really hard for me lately to put a lid on my feelings and I didn't know that you felt the same way about me. I just panicked because I was surprised. Spending time with you with you over the past few months has made me the happiest I've ever been and you always make me feel so special. I feel the same way about you, but I'm scared that I'm not like the people you hang out with. And I'm not a girl. All those thoughts just slammed into my head and made me freak out. It made me insecure. I've never felt the need to have a boyfriend before but I've fallen in love with you. I really do trust you so much and I'm sorry for running away. If you still like me, you can meet me at the new strawberry soda vending machine by the science block this evening at 5pm. I'll be waiting there for you. If you're angry and don't want to come, I understand, please don't worry.

Yours,

Jimin

Taehyung had found this in his locker one day. He'd known that Jimin liked him, it was so obvious that it screamed at him every single moment they'd interacted. The easy blushes and wide eyes, the little bursts of bravery he'd have that led him to initiate shaky conversation whenever they met, always secretly. Taehyung would sneak Jimin out of his house and take him on late night drives, or tug him into an isolated school hallway for an intimate chat, huddled too close to simply be friendly. It all came naturally and freely, because for the first time, he actually wanted this and cherished every stage of their little courting phase. The reward was palpable in his tongue, and Taehyung would feel little jolts of excitement everytime he'd be able to touch Jimin, platonically or not. And Taehyung's used to manipulating people. He'd given Jimin the *only boy in the world* treatment, the classic one, and made the first move one random night. Kissing him for the first time only broke open a dam of greed that would never be curbed once set free. Jimin had panicked and run away. Taehyung sent several apologies to him over text and maintained that he would be staying away until Jimin came to him. It worked exactly like he'd wanted it to.

So much effort. So much time invested.

And the thing is, Taehyung doesn't know which part of himself is real. He doesn't know whether the real part of him is the one who fucks around and hangs out with his friends, or

whether the real part of him is the one that's naturally coaxed out in Jimin's presence. He doesn't know. It used to be all pretend at first, a rehearsed act, his persona with Jimin. But lately, some thoughts and actions surface unprovoked, natural and instinctual. He still doesn't feel the need to change, likes the other side of him. But he can't have both. They can't coexist. He'll lose too much if either side is made known to the other.

There's the sudden urge to pack Jimin up into one of his suitcases and take him to Seoul with him. A piece of furniture. Someone for Taehyung to come home to. Like eating a packet of instant ramen after a long night of partying, a way of feeling grounded. But it's not possible.

Taehyung goes to sleep uneasy for the first time in his life.

-

Taehyung's birthday is uneventful for the first time ever since his childhood. His parents are out of town for a medical conference, and his friends are all busy with making sure they're all set for college. Most of their group has already left their town.

Still, he buys some bottles of soju and calls Seungchan, Hyungsoo and Taeil over in the evening. They drink and they reminisce like they're in their 70s, talking about different memories shared over high school and the years before. It's not like the parties he usually throws, but it somehow feels necessary. They laugh till their faces start to hurt and drink till all they taste and smell is alchohol, thoughts slow-moving and slippery.

His friends leave at 9 pm, each one of them having their own places to be. Hyungsoo has to go to the train station to pick up his aunt. Seungchan's mom wants him home early because she wants to spend time with him before he leaves for his university in Busan. Taeil isn't someone Taehyung's spoken to very often, so he suspects he'd left simply because the other two did. He couldn't be bothered to ask why.

The room is uncomfortably silent once they leave, and Taehyung doesn't feel like it's his birthday.

He picks up his phone to check the time and see how many hours of his special day he has left, only to realize that the device has run out of battery. He stumbles over to the socket near his bed and attaches the phone to his charger, feeling it vibrate back to life.

Once it reboots, Taehyung notices a flood of messages and missed calls.

3 missed calls from Minnie

5 hours ago

Minnie: Tae

Minnie: Where are you?

3 hours ago

Minnie: I thought you were picking me up and we'd celebrate together???
Minnie: We planned this last week. I even packed my night bag

Minnie: I can't take the bus my pass expired :((

2 hours ago

Minnie: Tae :(I haven't seen you today, it's your birthday

Minnie: Are you okay?

Taehyung curses. He'd completely forgotten about him.

He dials Jimin's number, and he notices the way the other boy picks up almost immediately.

“Hi, baby,” Taehyung says.

“Hey,” Jimin responds, voice small. *“Finally remembered me?”*

“I’m sorry. Can I come pick you up right now?”

Jimin’s silent for a few seconds, but eventually responds.

“Okay.”

“I’m on my way,” Taehyung says before he ends the call. He grabs his car keys and stumbles drunkenly down to the parking garage, socked feet skidding over the stairs. He doesn’t even stop to think about how he shouldn’t be driving in this state.

Still, he manages to get to Jimin’s house relatively unscathed. He just ran over a patch of flowers on someone’s driveway and might have knocked over a few trash cans.

Me: I’m here

Jimin takes 5 minutes to show up, and Taehyung understands why. He’s lugging 3 large bags, trying to balance them with all of his strength. His usual night bag is slung across his shoulders.

Taehyung immediately steps out of the car to help him, and Jimin’s little nose scrunches up the moment he gets close enough to take the bags from him.

“Have you been drinking?” Jimin asks.

“Maybe. My friends came over and forced me to. That’s why I didn’t see your calls, baby.”

“And you drove all the way here?” Jimin gasps, eyes widening.

“Don’t worry about it,” Taehyung dismisses. “What’s in the bags?” he asks, hearing the clinking of something inside. They’re heavy like rocks.

Jimin blushes furiously then. “Let’s go to your place first.”

Taehyung’s confused, but nods anyway. He swoops down to press a light kiss to Jimin’s cheek before he pecks him.

He moves to put the bags in the back seat, and when he’s done, he notices Jimin in the front ready to drive.

“Babe-”

“You shouldn’t be driving. I don’t have my licence yet but I’ve learned how,” Jimin says. “C’mon, get in.”

Taehyung gets into the passenger seat, and Jimin leans over the console to hug him now that both their hands are free.

“Happy birthday, baby. I love you.”

Taehyung feels winded for a second. It’s the first time he’s heard it so earnestly today. His friends had wished him casually, and his mother wished him over text. His father has forgotten. Something drops in his stomach, and before he knows it, he’s hugging Jimin back with all the ferocity in the world.

“I’m sorry I forgot,” he says, truly meaning it. His eyes are wet. Is it because he’s drunk? “I’m sorry. I’ve been saying sorry for a lot of things for a while but I really am.”

Jimin’s small hand rubs his back, and they stay like that for a while, in Taehyung’s quiet car in the quiet street behind Jimin’s house.

Eventually, Jimin pulls away and kisses his cheek.

The drive to Taehyung’s house is soothingly silent. He sits back in the passenger seat and the street lights look like bokeh in his eyes. There’s something hollow in his chest.

When they arrive, it’s almost domestic, the way they carry their bags in. Taehyung realizes he’d left the front door unlocked on his way out. They head inside, walking through Taehyung’s sprawling living room and lounge, eventually setting everything down onto the island in the spacious kitchen.

Jimin looks up at him, a small smile on his lips.

“You wanna eat or open your gift first?”

Taehyung suddenly realizes that he’s very hungry, and that he hadn’t eaten the entire day. All he had was a protein shake in the morning before going to the gym.

“I wanna eat,” he responds.

Jimin nods, cheeks red, and starts to lift containers of food one by one out of one of the bags. There’s a big bowl of seaweed soup, another of kimchi fried rice, and some side dishes.

“I knew your parents wouldn’t be home today so I made you seaweed soup and dinner. I thought we’d eat together,” Jimin reveals a bit hesitantly. He also takes out a cake. “I also

made this.” It’s a round small chocolate cake with messy frosting.

Taehyung eyes all the food, and he’s caught off guard.

“You made all this?” he asks, rounding the counter and looking at all the bowls piled high.

“Yeah,” Jimin confesses shyly. “It’s gone kinda cold now so we’ll have to heat it up. I’d made it so it’d be hot when you’d pick me up at 6.”

“Babe, you didn’t have to,” Taehyung says, partly in awe. It feels nice. He feels nice. He hasn’t felt this way before. He’s used to Jimin going out of his way for him, but it’s never been at this scale. “Why’d you do so much?”

“It’s your birthday, silly. When else do I go all out?”

Taehyung takes a seat on one of the little stools by the island and watches as Jimin heats up the dishes one by one. It’s a simple dinner, but Taehyung knows that Jimin doesn’t cook much so it’s a pretty big deal. The other boy toddles around the kitchen as if it’s his own, searching for cutlery. Taehyung, suddenly feeling miffed that Jimin’s focusing so much on the food when he should be paying attention to *him*, takes his shirt off. He walks over to Jimin and flexes his muscles to show off what he’d worked on today at the gym, insisting that Jimin touch and feel it all too. Jimin complies fondly, his cheeks blooming pink and he reaches up to kiss Taehyung ever so often. Taehyung starts to feel silly without his shirt on after a while, but makes no move to put it back on. He’s too drunk for that kind of bodily coordination and sticking his arms through the sleeves seems like too difficult of a task.

Once the timer on the microwave goes off, Jimin places the steaming bowl of seaweed soup before Taehyung.

“I tried replicating my mother’s recipe,” he says sheepishly. “I don’t know if it’ll be good-”

Taehyung takes a bite, and it's nice. It isn't *delicious*, but it tastes warm and homemade and full of love.

"It's amazing," Taehyung says, immediately gulping down another spoonful.

"Really?" Jimin asks sheepishly, although he perks up.

"Yeah. My birthday's complete now."

Jimin seems overjoyed by Taehyung's positive reaction, and it's a little bit of a relief considering how tense things have been between the two of them over the past few months. They've fought, and Taehyung's temper has gotten the better of him on more than one occasion.

He finishes the bowl of soup in record time, and Jimin rushes to heat up the kimchi fried rice. Taehyung doesn't ask why Jimin isn't eating with him, even though he's pretty sure the other boy hasn't had his dinner yet. He's more preoccupied with the way Jimin scurries around the kitchen to make him happy, desperate to not keep him waiting.

Taehyung eats till his tummy's about to explode. Jimin asks him if it's good every few seconds.

" 's not too spicy?" Jimin asks, leaning forward on his elbows on the island. "I tried to make it as unspicy as possible."

"It's perfect, baby," Taehyung drawls out. "You should become a chef."

Jimin laughs, the tinkling one that's usually coaxed out of him when he's shy.

They wrap up dinner then, and Taehyung polishes off both bowls of food even though they were clearly portions for two people. Jimin doesn't say a word.

And then Taehyung cuts the cake, the frosting already melting slightly considering they'd forgotten to put it in the fridge. Jimin pops a candle on and Taehyung makes his wish. He closes his eyes, focusing on his thoughts as Jimin glues himself to his back, small hands on his defined abdomen and his lips on Taehyung's shoulder.

I wish you'd always stay like this

It's a simple thought. Taehyung's always been popular, always had people swarming around him, hoping to be under his eye. Ever since kindergarten. And he has no doubt that it'll continue. But in moments like these, where his regular doses of attention and focus are scarce, it's nice to know that Jimin will always be there to wear himself thin to provide. He knows Jimin has exams around the corner, but he's still here with Taehyung.

Jimin does have a slice of cake with him, and he scrunches his nose up the moment he tastes it.

"It's too sweet," he complains, licking some of the gooey frosting off his lips. Taehyung tracks the movement, a lick of heat making itself known in his gut. It's awfully silent, Jimin's voice echoing through the kitchen loudly, bouncing off the walls with nothing to intercept it. Taehyung's house has always been empty and staggeringly large. Once, Taehyung screamed at the top of his lungs but no one heard him. It happened when he was little, and he wonders what would happen if he were to have an accident. Who would help him then, or even realize something's happened to him?

Jimin would, he thinks. He would and will. He always will. He'll always be Taehyung's.

"Tae?"

"Hmm?" Taehyung asks, looking up, snapping out of his haze. "What?"

“I asked you if you like the cake,” Jimin responds, biting at his bottom lip. He seems embarrassed. “I know it’s not that good. Don’t force yourself to eat it. If you don’t like it, I can put it away into a box that you can-”

“It’s amazing. It’s the best cake I’ve ever eaten,” Taehyung reveals, his voice hoarse. His vision is spinning. “Delicious cake and my beautiful you. This night can’t get any more better.”

Jimin blushes. “You don’t have to-”

“I promise.”

Taehyung consoles Jimin by eating 3 slices. And when his ravenous appetite finally gives, Jimin speaks.

“Do you want to open your gift now?” he asks, and his voice is slightly small. There’s a nervous smile plastered over his plush mouth, and he’s wringing his stubby fingers together. Taehyung eyes the massive gift bag sitting a few feet away. He’d be lying if he said he wasn’t curious.

“Yeah,” he responds, watching as Jimin runs to grab it. He lugs the heavy bag to where he sits, and Taehyung takes the large box out of the even larger bag. It’s gift wrapped, and it’s heavy. Jimin rushes to clear away the plates so Taehyung has enough room to open it up on the island.

Taehyung spares him a look before he unceremoniously tears open part of the intricate gift wrapping, obviously Jimin’s handiwork, and it’s only a second before he knows what it is inside.

“You got me a PS5?” Taehyung balks, genuinely surprised.

The gaming console had officially come out a few weeks ago, and Taehyung had missed both the preorder round last year and the official main release. It's almost always sold out, especially in their small little town.

"Y-Yeah," Jimin responds, cheeks ruddy red. "I stayed up and booked it for you back during the first preorder round. For my favourite future doctor."

"Baby, it costs nearly a million won," Taehyung adds incredulously, looking at the model. It's the most premium one, and Taehyung spots the few games Jimin has stuck to the outer box. Even the tape used is a strawberry print washi, Taehyung's favourite fruit.

"I knew you were waiting for it, so I worked last summer and over the weekends and holidays," Jimin reveals. "Mostly babysitting for that rich family down the road and mowing lawns. I covered at the grocery store sometimes too, and I even delivered newspapers! It was fun."

Taehyung thinks about how Jimin's using a beat-up 6 year old laptop for his school work. When Taehyung had pointed it out, Jimin had told him that their family couldn't afford buying him a new device. Not when Yoongi is going to college. There's the cost of accommodation, expensive textbooks and so much more. Even though he's won a pristine scholarship now. Jimin's father is a manager at a factory, having worked his way up to the office from the production line. Jimin's mother works full time at a clothing store as an attendant. It's part of the reason why Yoongi and Jimin are so close. Yoongi acted as Jimin's guardian rather than a brother as the two were often left alone growing up, their parents out all day struggling to provide. He used to cook their meals and help Jimin with his homework and projects, all while juggling his own. They live more comfortably now, but their parents are far from being able to splurge on their children.

"I knew how badly you wanted it, so I'd started saving up as soon as we got the launch date last year…" Jimin continues, looking down at his feet. "Do you like it? Are you happy?"

"You know I do…" Taehyung responds. "I guess I'm just shocked. I was expecting a massive teddy bear. Why-"

"Because you wanted it, and you do so much for me so why can't I for you? A-And I don't

know if I'll be there to celebrate your birthday with you next year," Jimin reveals, suddenly sounding vulnerable. "We'll be in different cities and you'll probably want to celebrate with your new friends."

"I want you to go to college in Seoul," Taehyung says. "Not Daejeon nor Busan nor Incheon. Seoul."

"I-"

"You have to come to Seoul. You'll follow me there, won't you? Don't you want to be together?"

Jimin bites at his bottom lip, and Taehyung has the sudden urge to pry it out from between his teeth with his thumb. He doesn't like it when Jimin hesitates when he's asking him something, especially since the question's so important.

"Most of my preferred colleges are in Seoul," Jimin responds eventually. "But I was looking at this one course in Gwangju, and-"

"You're coming to Seoul," Taehyung decides.

Jimin gapes at him like a trout.

"I'll t-try," he responds.

Taehyung smiles.

They spend the rest of the night setting up the console, and Taehyung teaches Jimin how to play one of the sharpshooter games he'd bought him. The younger boy sits in his lap, and he seems to be having so much fun that he can't contain it. Taehyung sabotages most of his wins

by digging his fingers into Jimin’s delicate ribs during critical moments in the game and tickling him, and licking up the length of his pretty neck. He’s already half hard in his sweats, but then he always is around Jimin. His plush ass seated directly onto his cock doesn’t help in the slightest. Taehyung's got a lazy, horny, inebriated and content smile spread across his lips. When he takes the controller back, Jimin sits by his side and cheers on. It’s a wide-eyed sort of innocent happiness that’s so typically and wholly Jimin.

They head to bed later, Taehyung placing sloppy kisses up the back of Jimin’s neck. The sex is rushed and instinctual, although there’s something tender in the way Jimin curls his fingers into his hair. Evident in the way he places his lips on the soft space underneath Taehyung’s ear, his ankles crossed over the small of his back, delicate anklet brushing over his feverish skin. Jimin tells him he loves him. There’s something in Taehyung’s lungs that keeps him from returning the words. He grips his jaw and kisses him instead, relishing the way his body goes slack.

When he pulls away, time seems to stop for a little while.

Jimin’s looking at him, eyes wide and glossy with love. They’re glazed over, the way they usually are when they’re intimate. The lights are off, and the crack of moonlight from the window highlights a portion of Jimin’s face. His eyes seem lighter, pupils dilated. He’s almost sparkling, Taehyung thinks. Beautiful, and all his. It’s so quiet, and he feels Jimin’s fragile heartbeat pressed against his, the press of his clavicles against his skin.

Jimin’s little fingers come up to hold the sides of face, cupping his cheeks during this sudden tender moment they’re sharing. Their noses brush, Taehyung’s sharp one nudging Jimin’s button one. Something twinges in his chest, and there’s the weight of an unspoken promise in the way Jimin refuses to look away, like he can’t bear to not have Taehyung in his vision. Taehyung continues to stare, not doing so much as breathe to stay in the present.

Jimin leans up to kiss him, and the moment breaks. Hot lust seeps through the cracks, rushing through his brain, tipping the balance over. The noise returns, the molten pool in his belly sweltering and acidic. Builds and builds until it snaps, like the crack of a whip.

And when they sleep, Taehyung hopes his wish comes true.

-

Their graduation ceremony doesn't feel real.

Taehyung's watched their seniors graduate before. Batches of familiar faces ushered out into the real world, never to be seen again. He would get closer to the finish line each year, and it feels surreal to finally be there.

He's partly surprised that his parents made it. They're in the audience, sitting on two chairs on the sprawling lawn of their school grounds. His father takes a phone call when it's Taehyung's turn to collect his diploma, but his mother records the exchange with a smile.

Jimin also records, discreetly. His phone isn't up in the air but Taehyung sees the way he's beaming at his phone screen, camera angled toward him. He's dressed neatly, wearing a pristine sky blue shirt with black trousers, hair combed back. His parents look proud too, and the 3 of them stand up and cheer when it's Yoongi's turn a few students after Taehyung's.

Taehyung stares at the scroll in his hands. The past 14 years of his school life, all summed up in this tiny coil of paper, held together by a cheap ribbon. He barely has time to introspect before one of his friends grabs him by the collar and pulls him in to click a group picture.

He looks over the crowd, and notices Jimin giving him a small wave from where he stands with his family. There's so much love in his eyes.

Taehyung looks away, going back to horsing around with his friends.

-

The night Yoongi leaves for Daejeon by bus, Taehyung makes it a point to fuck Jimin at least twice every single day until it's time for him to leave too.

And it works, for the most part. There's no one to supervise, and Taehyung liberally strolls into the Park family home like it's his, gripping Jimin's cheeks and yanking him in for a hard

kiss whenever he opens the door. His parents are never around, like always.

Yoongi left early because he needs to settle down and find a part time job to help with expenses. There's a lot to set up, and his early departure broke Jimin's heart.

All the better for Taehyung. He gladly volunteers himself to fill the gaping void.

Right now, he's got him bent over the kitchen counter, pounding him from behind. Jimin's cheek is squished against the marble countertop, Taehyung holding him down by the back of his neck. He's addicted to the sight of Jimin's tight hole clinging to his cock every time he pulls out, pink rim fucked sloppy. He looks down and sees that Jimin's standing on his tip toes, barely able to balance himself. The sight only makes him harder.

"What am I gonna do without you, huh?" Taehyung muses, grip tightening on Jimin's tapered waist. He brings a hand down to slap his ass, fingers then fisting into the thigh high stockings he'd got him. The flimsy fabric rips underneath his nails and Taehyung grips the fat underneath, possessive.

Jimin's scrabbling for purchase over the counter, and he squeaks when Taehyung picks up the pace. He's got the choker on right now. Taehyung eyes the soft fabric.

Sweat trickles down Taehyung's abdomen, and he's dressed in nothing but his sweats. The waistband is pulled just low enough to expose his cock. He never thought he'd be dressed down in the Park family kitchen, fucking their son within an inch of his life. Family pictures surround them, as do adorable drawings stuck to the fridge with magnets.

Jimin's face is a deep shade of pink from where he can see it, ears a fiery red. Taehyung spanks him once more, the fat of Jimin's ass jiggling with the intensity of it. Jimin squeals, surging forward as if to shy away from the searing burn, and Taehyung has a nasty idea.

He loops his fingers into the back of the satin choker and uses his other hand to spank Jimin again, except harder this time. Jimin jumps forward once more and chokes, the fabric pulled thin and pressing over his throat.

Taehyung wrings it back, closing his eyes as he hears Jimin gurgle the tighter it gets. It's so fucking hot that it sets him alight, and he's slammed with another heavy wave of arousal. Taehyung spanks him once more, looking at the red marks of his hand printed nice and neat on Jimin's milky skin. He does it over and over, grip on the choker growing tighter with each passing second.

He feels hands fly back and nails scratching at him.

His eyes are closed, so all he can hear are the wet sounds of his cock repeatedly reaming into the other boy, the aborted breaths. The sound of kids playing in the street outside that seeps in through the open window. Jimin's become tighter around him.

Taehyung lets go of the choker just as he's about to cum.

And the sound of Jimin heaving and gasping for breath is what makes him snap. He cums so hard his vision spots for a few seconds, hips slamming against Jimin's bruised ass as he rides it out, milks it for all its worth, releasing deep inside him.

"Fuck," he grits out, yanking Jimin up so his back is flush with his chest, turning the other boy's face toward him and kissing him deep and languid. He grinds into him, hips rolling lazily. "That was so fucking hot," he says against Jimin's lips, nipping down.

"We should do that again," Taehyung adds, pressing a kiss to the back of Jimin's neck. "Did you cum?" he asks, reaching down to grab Jimin's cock. It's soft, so he assumes he did.

Taehyung pulls out and tucks himself back into his sweats, walking over to the nearest washroom to clean up. Jimin stays by the counter, gripping the edges of it with white fingers as he takes in shaking breaths, knees quivering like a newborn fawn.

He jumps when Taehyung returns with a wet cloth, mopping up the cum starting to trail down his thighs. Taehyung notices that he's shaking more than usual.

“Hey,” Taehyung calls. He turns Jimin around, looking him in the eyes. “You okay?”

“Y-Yeah,” Jimin responds, managing a weak smile. He looks a little pale, skin clammy. There’s something akin to unregistered shock in the wide of his eyes. “Can you please take the choker off me?”

“But it looks so pretty on you,” Taehyung coaxes, pouting.

“Please take it off,” Jimin insists, a little more urged this time, something fragile in his tone.

Taehyung frowns, but complies. He undoes the clasp and lets the satin fall. There’s a thin line of purple round the circumference of Jimin's neck, dotting blood where the satin cut too deep.

“Fuck, that’s hot,” Taehyung groans. “You look so beautiful.”

“I don’t want to wear it a-again,” Jimin says. “Please don’t make me wear it.”

“Why not? I-”

“I d-don’t want to,” Jimin repeats.

“What’s wrong?” Taehyung asks, face morphing into feigned concern. He pulls Jimin closer. “Tell me.”

“I got r-really scared. When you pulled on it and I couldn’t breathe. Sorry, I just wasn’t expecting it-”

But that's the best part

"I know you told me you wanted to try breathplay before but it caught me off guard. I don't mean to be such a baby, I promise, I-"

"Jimin-"

"I don't think it's for me. I don't think I enjoy that kinda stuff," Jimin reveals, almost spluttering. "I tried to get into it but it just ended up making me scared."

"But it's just me," Taehyung coaxes. "Didn't you like that for only a little while, you handed yourself over to me?"

"I d-don't know."

"I enjoy knowing that you trust me," Taehyung says softly. "Trust me enough to put yourself in my care, be dependent that way. Does it sound better when I say it like that?"

"Maybe? I don't-"

"I'm not asking for that much, Minnie. Just an open mind. Especially now, when it's our last few days together. We'll only be able to see each other a few times a year after."

Jimin's silent, but Taehyung knows he's listening. The other boy's eyes dimmed the moment Taehyung reminded him of their impending separation.

"It'll be like a way of showing me that you're mine. Our bond will grow deeper," Taehyung coaxes. "Just a few more times so it grows on you. If you don't like it after that, we'll stop. It's only me, my love. No need to be scared."

“O-Okay, I’ll try. But go slow next time, please,” Jimin relents, although he doesn’t sound very sure of himself.

“Of course.” Taehyung kisses him, then initiates a hug which the other boy eventually returns. “Just a week to go.”

Jimin holds him tighter.

“I’ll be so lonely,” he says, voice soft and sad. “Can’t you go just before it’s supposed to start? Stay here for a few days longer?”

“I gotta set up my apartment. And figure out the commute and stuff. It’s just a short walk but still, I need to settle in.”

Jimin stares up at him, mouth curved downward. His eyes are wide and wet, and there’s a deep sorrow darkening his expression.

“I’ll come back during my breaks,” Taehyung consoles. “And we’ll still call and text.”

“I wish we didn’t have to grow up,” Jimin says. “I wish it could just be you and me here every day. Like it’s been for the past 2 years. I wish things didn’t have to change.”

Taehyung smiles.

“We’ll grow, but we won’t change. You and I, we’ll always be the same.”

Jimin smiles a little then, and sniffles.

Taehyung pulls him into another hug, and Jimin's face gets squished into his neck. Taehyung holds him, because intuition tells him that's what they need right now. It isn't easy for him either. He's excited to move to Seoul and live his new life, fuck around and have fun, but there is a certain sense of nostalgia and comfort he's come to find in Jimin's presence. One he'll definitely miss.

They stay like that for a little while, in Jimin's quaint little kitchen. They go to sleep later.

Taehyung watches Jimin for a little while as he sleeps.

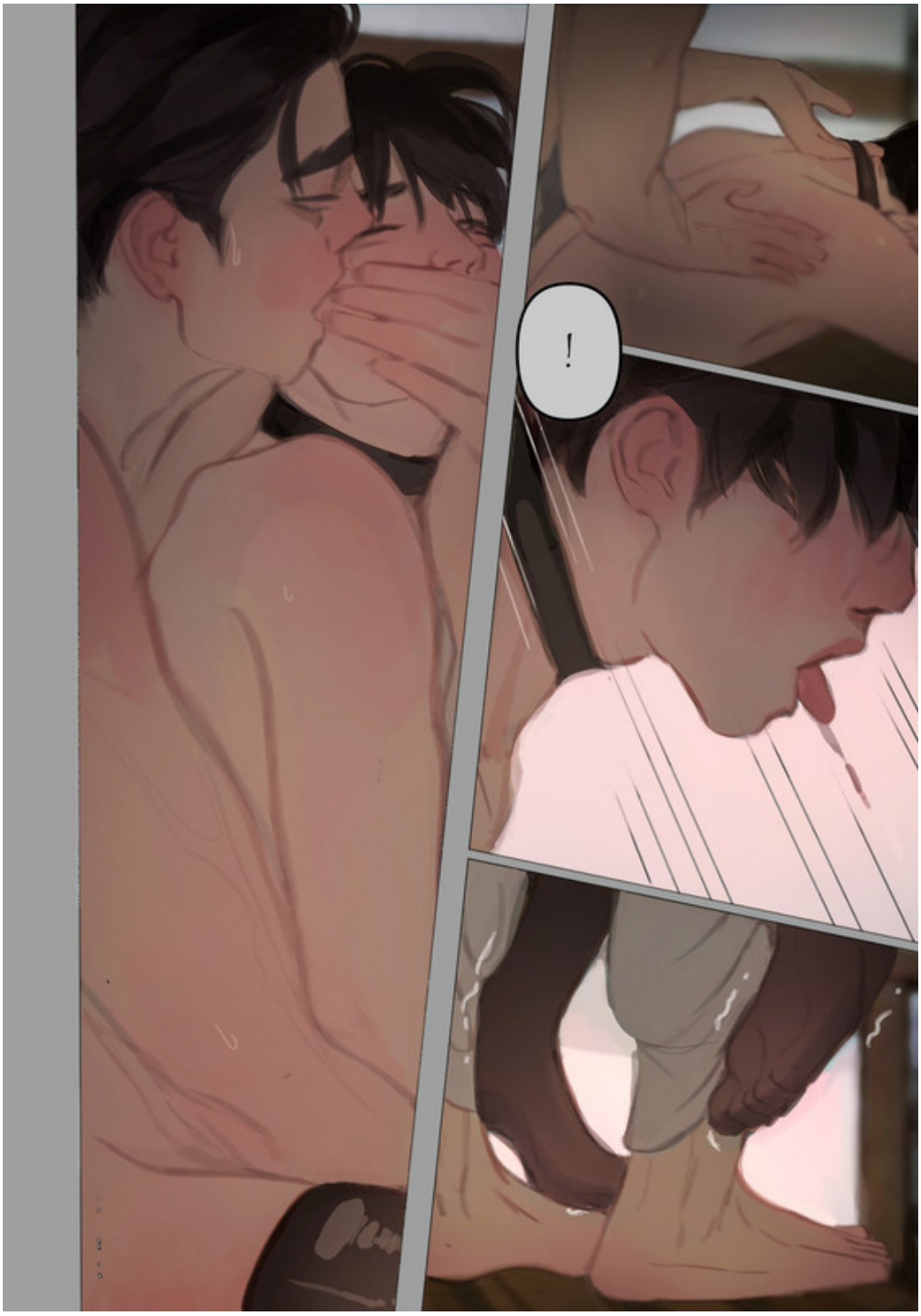
He's so…naive. It's the first thing, the first aspect of Jimin's personality that has always stuck out to him. Taehyung doesn't ever want it to change. But it is inevitable. Jimin is bound to meet all sorts of people in university when it's his turn to leave their little town, people who are nothing like his tight knit family and the person Taehyung has painted himself to be. He'll grow up, and naturally, will change. It could be for the better. Jimin could thrive in a big city, his inner social butterfly coaxed out. People are more tolerant there, and would welcome him. Or he could regress into something smaller if overwhelmed.

Taehyung thinks back to his wish, the one he made on his birthday. Where he wished Jimin would always stay the way he is, in his love and devotion to Taehyung.

They've already made the decision to stay together once he leaves. Jimin because he can't seem to imagine a life without Taehyung, and Taehyung because he can't stomach the thought of Jimin finding someone else, or not being able to still own him when he visits during his breaks.

One step at a time, he supposes. Life is unpredictable, and he'll roll with the punches. What he's going to do is tuck the concept of Jimin away into a little jar, one that he's going to keep on a shelf. High enough that it's out of sight, but still within reach whenever he wants to indulge.

He'll only matter when Taehyung wants him to.



Beautiful artwork created by Alek.Dar!

Chapter End Notes

And that's the third chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 4: The Tower

Chapter Notes

Here's the fourth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

Beautiful moodboard made by Ina (cappuccinokyu) <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Taehyung’s first day of university goes exactly the way he’d planned.

He attends his orientation wearing cool, approachable clothes. Drives there too, noticing the way several people glance at his car as he parks. Sat through the whole boring drivel by the faculty about how they’re the next generation to save lives. There are already people approaching him, and by the time they’ve reached lunch break, Taehyung has already exchanged numbers with six girls and has committed to attending a party. Everyone knows he’s rich too, because the professor pointed out that he knew Taehyung’s parents during their very first class, sure that Taehyung would follow in their footsteps to become a great neurosurgeon.

Seoul is every bit what he’d thought it would be.

The first day he arrived, he'd settled in and had a boring afternoon. Arranging his furniture and unpacking. His apartment is gorgeous. And then he'd gotten ready later in the evening and walked into the first club he could find. No one ID'd him. He'd danced and downed glass after glass of burning neat liquor. All he remembers is dancing with faceless girl after girl and someone dragging him to the fancy washroom. The clink of his belt being unbuckled and the feeling of someone swallowing down his cock, long hair wound tight in his grasp. He was high on it, knowing that he didn't have to do so much as try.

And he did it again. Visited different clubs every day, each night ending more or less the same way. He brought a girl home the second night but fucked her in the living room, somehow not comfortable with bringing her to the bedroom. After that, he insists on going to their place, whoever it is. He's been brought to at least 5 different houses, ranging between crowded share houses, studios and fancy apartments. Did a motel last night.

Taehyung's unravelling. The freedom is too much, and it's addictive. He's been drunk for the past week, had sex more times than he can count. All before he'd even started university.

And now, he's already popular. He hears people talk about how he's definitely the most handsome in their batch, somehow already the general crush. About how he's so easygoing and smart, with a deep voice and fit body to match. Nice hair and attractive height. *Oh my god, did you hear he knows how to fight? Mina told me he's a medalist in Taekwondo-*

His ego's fatter than it has ever been. And the best part is, he still keeps the mystery. No one knows that he's from a small town. Taehyung has been mastering the Seoul dialect for months prior to moving here, all so that he doesn't accidentally come across as a country bumpkin. It's seamless, the way the words present themselves differently on his tongue, as if they haven't been pronounced an alternate way all his life until the past week. Everyone assumes he's a rich kid from Seoul with strong creds.

And,

Surprisingly,

He hasn't thought about Jimin once.

Wait, that's a lie. He sort of has, a few times. But not in the *I wonder how he's doing, or I miss him*, way. It's almost Pavlovian. In the past week, whenever he's opened his hazy eyes and seen someone underneath him or on their knees, a part of his mind just automatically says *Jimin*. Just his name. And that somehow serves to make the sex better almost immediately. He saw him one time too, in the side alley of some club, Jimin's soft black neatly cut hair and delicate nose appearing in his line of his vision too before his eyes refocused and grounded back to the person sucking him off.

He can't shake him off.

But he supposes some habits are difficult to grow out of. They'll sneak their way into your mind and scream in your eardrums at the slightest of triggers. And Jimin, someone who he has always associated with raw, unfiltered and untapered lust, naturally can't be forgotten so easily.

In fact, Taehyung still remembers to stay in touch superficially. And there's a pulse of nostalgia the moment he sees Jimin's childish emojis and way of typing. There's still a sense of ownership he feels as he looks at Jimin's profile picture. His horizons have grown wider. And Jimin's existence between them has shrunk to a size easy to overlook. Out of sight, it's criminally easy for Taehyung to find his usual fix in the bodies of others. Even if he hasn't yet felt the ferality he had with Jimin. Not yet.

His phone vibrates as he sits through his 3rd seminar of the day, one to tell the students about the history of the university and notable alumni.

Speak of the devil.

Minnie: School sucks

Minnie: I hate it

Minnie: I'm all alone and I can't see you

Minnie: I miss you so much that my heart hurts every day

Me: Pay attention to your teacher, love

Minnie: You responded!!

Minnie: how is your first day going??? Is everyone nice?

Me: Can't complain

Me: Missing you. Can't stop thinking about you

Jimin's typing for a while. Taehyung knows him well enough to send the next message without hesitation.

Me: Don't cry, baby

Minnie: how did you know :(

Minnie: I've cried myself to sleep every night since you left

Something rises in Taehyung's chest.

Minnie: It's only been a week. And I'm being so clingy and embarrassing im sorry

Me: Its fine

Me: You're cute like this

Me: Are you crying in class?

Minnie: I'm actually not in school right now

Minnie: I'm feeling sick so im staying home today. My eyes are puffy and my throat is sore.

Minnie: I'm in bed right now

Me: All alone?

Me: Poor baby

Minnie: No :(

Minnie: When the grandma next door heard I was sick she sent her nephew Minsoo to sit with me. He made me chicken soup

Minnie: He's visiting from America. He told me his American name is Marcus. Isn't that cool? He keeps teasing me because I can't pronounce it correctly. I'm calling him hyung now instead hehe

Taehyung's eyebrows pinch. What the fuck?

Me: He's in the bedroom with you?

Minnie: No >.< my room is messy and I'm feeling sad and sleepy ٩(´◯`*)و. He's watching TV downstairs.

Me: You think he's attractive?

His fingers dig into the screen as he types it.

Minnie: He's ok??

It's involuntary. The way Taehyung suddenly starts to imagine Jimin having sex with this man. And it makes his blood boil. It's almost funny, the jarring shift in mood. As easy as breathing.

Me: You better stay away from him

Me: Sounds like bad news

Minnie: Don't worry, he's really sweet

Minnie: Plus it's nice having someone to talk to

Me: I know how men think

Minnie: I'm a man too?

Me: I'm being serious, babe

Me: Don't talk to him anymore

Me: He probably just wants to fuck you

Minnie: It's not like that. You don't trust me?

Minnie: I would never cheat on you

Minnie: And hyung isn't like that at all. He's nice I promise

Minnie: Are you upset with me? :((

Minnie is typing…

Taehyung curses, locking his phone and pocketing it even as Jimin's messages continue to flow in.

And just like that, his first day at university is ruined.

-

“Hello?” Taehyung answers the phone. It’s an unknown caller ID.

“Hey, hotshot. Remember me?”

There’s something familiar in the way the words are spoken. But Taehyung can’t really place it.

“Who is this?” He presses, walking down a crowded street. He only hopes his AirPods pick up his voice clearly. There's a strong breeze. Class is over, and Taehyung’s heading home to take a quick nap before he leaves to meet some of his classmates at a pub. The day so far has been tiring, lots of practical sessions dealing with cadavers.

“An old friend.”

Taehyung’s mind runs. It can’t be anyone from back home.

“Is that so?” He responds absentmindedly. It’s a male voice, rather deep. “How old?”

“Let’s just say the last time we saw each other, you were in your power rangers phase. Ring any bells?”

So when Taehyung was around 9.

“Still searching.”

“You still got that Charmander water bottle?”

Suddenly, it clicks.

“Joon? Namjoon Hyung?” He half yells into the phone, stopping in his tracks. People walk around him, some tutting at having their path blocked.

“*Bingo*.”

“Where’ve you been, oh my god!” Taehyung laughs, suddenly thrilled. Namjoon and him used to be neighbours, and really, truly, he was Taehyung’s first real friend. Perhaps his only one too, before Namjoon moved to Japan with his family when he was 10, Taehyung 9.

“Around,” Namjoon responds vaguely. *“Heard you’re in Seoul. I just happen to be your sunbae.”*

“You go to KU?”

“Yeah. Been here for a year,” Namjoon drawls out. *“You’re already quite popular, aren’t you? It’s barely been a few weeks. My friend showed me a picture of you in some campus crush chatroom. Saw your face and name and it hit me like a truck. Still got the same smile. I stole your number off her.”*

Campus crush chatroom? Taehyung smirks, smug.

“Where are you? Let’s meet up,” he says.

Namjoon chuckles, and if Taehyung’s still got the same smile, Namjoon’s got the same laugh.

“How does dinner sound?”

-

When Taehyung walks into the fried chicken restaurant, he spots Namjoon immediately. The other man stands the moment their eyes meet, and his eyes crinkle up in a way that's cloyingly familiar.

"Long time," Taehyung laughs, and it's genuine.

Namjoon pulls him into a warm hug, and Taehyung is mildly intimidated by his strong build and staggering height. It's when he pulls away that he notices the girl seated in the chair next to Namjoon's.

"This is my girlfriend, Daeun," Namjoon introduces. The girl remains seated, and she's looking at Taehyung with a glint in her eyes. She's got a pixie cut and large expressive eyes, sharp features and a small frame. There's something intimidating about her, right from the tattoos sprawling up her arms to the piercings in her ear, heavy eyeliner.

Taehyung extends his hand, and she takes it, smiling.

"Nice to meet you," Taehyung greets, slightly intrigued.

"You too," she says, and she's extremely attractive. Their eyes lock for a few seconds before Namjoon sits down, the sound of his chair moving drawing Taehyung's attention back to the moment.

Taehyung sits down from across the both of them, relaxing back into his seat.

Namjoon's mostly the same. He's become more wholesome than anything, wearing clothes with earthy tones and talking mostly about art and music. He's studying art history and wants to become a curator. When Taehyung asks if they should get a few beers, Namjoon reveals that he doesn't drink. Daeun accepts the invite though. Namjoon tells his girlfriend about how Taehyung used to be when they were younger, sensitive and funny. Taehyung's smile is a little forced after that, knowing that he's changed in an irreparable way.

When did he start to rot? Did it originate in a bruise from a fall, or did the mould exist somewhere deep within his soul, vicious and decaying, eating him from the inside as the years went by?

“So, are you seeing anyone?” Namjoon asks.

“No,” Taehyung answers, and it comes to him so easily. “Not really one for relationships.”

“What does that mean?” Daeun asks, snorting.

“I don’t like to be tied down,” Taehyung clarifies. “I’m not a fan of commitment.”

Namjoon nods in understanding, and Daeun looks at him with an indecipherable expression.

“Funny, everyone seems to think you’re like a romantic lead in a drama.”

Taehyung laughs at Daeun’s words. She takes a sip of her beer, and he takes the opportunity to observe her. Her posture is confident, and he notices the way her fingers are intertwined with Namjoon’s under the table.

“So how’re you settling in? Is it hard being away from home? And how’s med school so far?” Namjoon asks.

“You know how my parents are. I’ve been emotionally independent for a while. And I’ve got someone to cook and clean so it’s all good. My apartment’s a short walk from campus. And school is fine, a breeze so far. Lots of practical sessions.”

Namjoon hums. “You should come over some time,” he says. “I can’t promise I’m much of a cook but I’m good at making japchae. Right, baby?”

“Yes, it’s the best japchae in the world,” Daeun says, fondly. She leans in to kiss Namjoon’s cheek that blooms red under the touch.

“I’ll definitely take you up on that. You should come over too, we could play video games.”

Namjoon grins in response.

All in all, it’s a nice time. Taehyung always enjoyed spending time with Namjoon, and he finds that it’s no different now, despite the fact that it’s been a decade and they’ve lived entirely different lives after they drifted apart. He’s nice, and Taehyung doesn’t quite feel like upholding a facade around him. He’s warm, he’s nice and he’s kind, and a part of Taehyung wonders if he would’ve turned out differently if Namjoon was still in his life. Someone to ground him, someone who he respects.

They leave just as the restaurant’s about to close, parting ways on the walkway just outside. Namjoon gives him a hug, and Taehyung notices the way Daeun turns around just slightest to get another look at him before they leave. Taehyung holds the gaze, eyeing her slim frame and the way she leans into Namjoon’s side.

Hm.

-

“Put another finger in.”

Jimin moans brokenly on Taehyung’s laptop screen, the feed grainy because of his low quality webcam. It does nothing to hide the high flush on his cheeks though, the sweat on his clavicles shining underneath the dim lights of his bedroom. He’s on his hands and knees facing the camera, the fingers of his right hand jammed up his slick hole.

Taehyung reclines on his couch, vision boring into his laptop screen. He’s got his sweats pulled just low enough to expose his hard cock, a fist wrapped tightly around the girth. Every

aborted breath from Jimin's lips makes his length twitch with replenished arousal.

"I can't, the angle's wrong, I can't do it myself-" Jimin gasps out although it's mostly a whine, and Taehyung knows. He's made Jimin finger himself in front of him before, and knows how pathetic he is at it.

This was Taehyung's idea, having sex over video call. It's symbiotic. Jimin's need to have his company gets sated and Taehyung gets to get off. Jimin doesn't seem to have noticed the red dot on the upper right corner of his screen.

"Use my gift," Taehyung suggests. He watches as Jimin shakily withdraws his fingers, shuffling over the bed to pick up the box Taehyung told him to keep ready. He opens it and pulls out a pretty glass dildo, with a pink heart shaped base. Taehyung scoured the internet for a while for it, feeling it almost in keeping with Jimin's overall vibe. It was an easy purchase.

"I wish you were here," Jimin says, half sobs, either in arousal or genuine nostalgia.

Taehyung ignores him, his cock throbbing in his hand at the sight of Jimin lubing up the dildo with his little fingers.

"Get on your back, I wanna see it," he rasps out, realizing how exasperated and desperate he is. You can hear how raw it is in his voice. It's moments like these when he realizes how much he misses Jimin. It's a latent realization, the way he realizes that most of the sex he's been having in Seoul pales in comparison to the visceral lust flowing through his blood right now. And Jimin isn't even here. There are no thick thighs for Taehyung to grab and touch, no hole for him to sink into, no pale neck for him to bruise.

Jimin props up a few of his cushions and lays back on them, spreading his legs. His hair fans out over the pillow. Taehyung eyes his flushed face and the familiar room, the stuffies and wall calendar and pastel blue alarm clock. There's a new diffuser he sees on the bedside table.

Jimin's fingers curl around the base of the dildo, and he mewls when the tip presses against his hole. It’s almost pornographic, the way he starts to push it in torturously slow, his back bowing off the bed.

“ ‘s been a while,” Jimin whines once it’s halfway sheathed inside of him. “Won’t go in.”

“Make it go in,” Taehyung commands, depraved and turned on beyond belief. It’s almost like Jimin’s a camboy, and Taehyung thinks he’d do fantastically well at it. The naive, spillingly horny yet so helpless persona. Appeals to perverts everywhere.

But Taehyung doesn’t like to share. This little show, it’s all for him.

Jimin starts to thrust it in shallowly, his face turned into the crook of his elbow. His laptop is propped at the foot of his bed, and the feed starts to shake as the mattress shifts under Jimin as his movements get more desperate. He’s slowly able to take the dildo in deeper, pretty cock drooling over his flat tummy, hard and untouched.

“You’re so pretty,” Taehyung praises, stroking himself in rhythm with Jimin. “Always the prettiest.”

Jimin’s chest starts to rise and fall heavier then, pushing the dildo in faster and faster. His pace is erratic and shaky, more desperate than anything. He’s never really had to do this part himself, and his inexperience is quite endearing. Jimin’s a spoiled brat.

Taehyung’s eyes burn into the screen, the lights in his apartment off, nothing but the streetlights outside illuminating the space. It’s quiet, only the sounds of his breathing and the *shlick* of his hand moving around his cock. It plays in with Jimin’s keens that are muffled by the poor audio receptor of his laptop.

He knows that Jimin’s about to cum when his back arches off the bed, hips jerking as he tries to ride the dildo as he fucks it into himself, rhythm sloppy and fast. Taehyung increases his pace too, his jaw set and face stoic, jerking himself so hard it almost hurts.

Jimin writhes as he cums, toes curling. The splatter of it sheens over his stomach in the dim light, Taehyung noticing the way his fingers tremble where they grip the base of the dildo. It takes no more than a few rough jerks of his cock before he's spilling over his fist too, cum dribbling down his knuckles. His chest heaves, and he suddenly feels raw somewhere deep within his ribcage.

Jimin takes a while to catch his breath, legs loose, pliable and spread over the bed. His eyes are still pressed shut.

"Baby?" Taehyung calls.

"Yeah?" Jimin's voice is so soft that it makes him smile just the slightest.

"You okay?"

Jimin makes an affirmative noise. "I'm okay."

"Are you sure?" Taehyung asks. "You've been quiet all evening."

Jimin had been bugging him for weeks about doing an online date. They'd both have something to eat while they talk, then watch a movie together.

Taehyung had made the time, mostly because he knew he'd been blowing Jimin off way too much recently.

But as soon as he'd called Jimin at the allotted time, the younger boy seemed distant. And it's been a few hours now and he's still the same. He'd been distracted during their movie, and he'd been mostly silent during dinner.

Jimin sits up then, and he looks adorable. His hair is mussed and cheeks are red, lips bitten raw. He reaches over his bed and pulls on a t-shirt, then drawing his knees to his chest.

“ ‘m fine,” he insists.

Taehyung frowns.

“Tell me.”

“It’s just…” Jimin trails off, voice hesitant.

“Just what?”

“Are you coming home for chuseok?”

Taehyung’s eyebrows raise. Somehow, he thought it’d be something a little more serious.

“Why? Is that what was bothering you?”

Jimin’s silent for a few seconds, biting at his bottom lip. Had they been together physically, Taehyung would pry it out.

“Everyone’s talking about coming home and having time off, and you haven’t said a word. I was wondering if you were coming. You probably aren’t, I know, but I just thought you’d tell me anyway-”

“I’m coming,” Taehyung responds nonchalantly. “I think mom booked my tickets last week.”

Taehyung's mildly surprised when Jimin frowns rather than smiles.

"What? You don't want me to come?" Taehyung asks, something akin to ice freezing up in his veins.

"Of course I want you to come," Jimin says, tone clipped. "I'm just hurt that you didn't think to tell me. You knew for a week? Are there other people you'd rather see?"

"No, I-"

"You have no idea how hard it's been for me, being alone without you. And you just don't care-"

"Don't interrupt me," Taehyung cuts in, voice firm. Jimin shuts up immediately, mouth clamping closed.

"Of course I care," he continues. "University has been super busy, especially since I also have swimming and taekwondo that are now at collegiate levels. It's not easy, I barely have any time to breathe, and I use all the time that I do to text you."

Jimin's silent.

"I was going to tell you today, I promise. You just didn't seem like you were in a good mood so I didn't know whether it was the right time."

It's not a lie. Taehyung was planning to tell him over the call.

“I need you to text me,” Jimin says then, and his face scrunches up as he inhales shakily. “I need you to talk to me. Even if it’s just a single alphabet in the morning if you’re too busy, I just n-need to hear from you. I need to know that you’re thinking about me because I’m always thinking about you.”

Taehyung listens.

“It’s been so hard. Without you and hyung. I don’t have any friends. All I do is study and watch dramas. It’s been good for my grades, but-” Jimin pauses to wipe away what Taehyung presumes are tears. “Every time I check my phone and I don’t see a text from you, it makes me so sad I can’t bear it. And then I tell myself that I’m not going to be the one to text you first this time. But then I always do, even if I have to seem foolish just to hear from you, only for you to leave me on read all over again-”

“Jimin, baby-”

Jimin’s phone starts to ring. He shakily rummages through his sheets to find it, sniffling as he sees the caller ID.

“Don’t answer it,” Taehyung says. “We need to talk about this.”

“Hyung’s calling,” Jimin responds, sounding tired. “I’ll talk to you later.”

“Jimin-” Taehyung warns, tone low.

All he sees is the feed of Jimin closing his laptop shut, and his voice cuts off just as he answers the phone.

“Hi hyung, how was your day? I was- no, I’m not crying-”

Taehyung immediately grabs his phone, stiff fingers harshly typing out a rushed message, nearly digging into the screen.

Me: Don’t you dare ever hang up on me again.

Me: We weren’t done talking

Jimin sees the message a few seconds later.

Minnie: I’m sorry for hanging up on you, I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings

What? *Feelings*?

Minnie: But think about how this is what I always feel whenever you reject my calls and leave me on read

Minnie: I’m talking to hyung now so I’ll text you later if I’m feeling up to it

Yoongi.

Funny.

Taehyung hasn’t thought about him in months. He thinks about how Jimin told him that Yoongi wanted to go to college in Seoul, and he wonders whether KAIST was so tempting for Yoongi to give up on his big city dream.

Even from whichever ditch he’s living in right now, he’s slighting him.

Taehyung’s irritated, and he suddenly feels a little icky. His cum has dried over his hands, and his shirt sticks to his body with sweat. There’s that raw feeling again, a tender unpleasant bloom in his chest.

He needs to do better. Tomorrow, the first thing he's going to do once he wakes up is text Jimin. He'll send him a selfie, because Jimin always blushes when he sees his stubble in the mornings.

Maybe he should set an alarm. Or two. One in the morning, another sometime in the evening, so that he'd remember to text Jimin. Somehow, when they video call or actually start to text, the distance doesn't feel so wide. It's just making the effort to spark the conversation that bores Taehyung. There's so much right in front of him, so much happening so quickly, and it's hard to tear yourself away from that focus on your phone. Even if it's Jimin.

He has trouble sleeping that night. The pills don't help either.

And Jimin never texts.

-

Taehyung sends flowers to Jimin's house.

He orders a massive bouquet online, chock full of all of Jimin's favourite colours. The stars are orchids and lilies, what he thinks (he hopes) are his favourite flowers. He sends a card too, one of those glittery ones with gold foil letters. It reads *can't wait to see you in two weeks*, and Taehyung hopes it'll fix things.

He thinks about getting chocolates too, but decides against it. It might not be wise to overdo it.

Taehyung's laying on his couch, monitoring the tracking. It should reach Jimin tomorrow, and-

His phone starts to ring. It's Namjoon, and Taehyung picks up after a few beats.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Taehyung. Are you home?"

"Yeah, hyung. What's up?"

Namjoon chuckles, and it's a little awkward.

"I kinda have a small favour to ask you," he says. *"Daeun's alone on campus and she isn't feeling well right now. Would it be okay if she rested at yours for a bit? I'm not at home and she lives really far away-"*

Taehyung raises his eyebrows.

"Of course," he responds. "That's totally fine, hyung."

"Thanks, Tae. I owe you one. I gotta go, I'm at a recording. Would it be okay if I sent her your number? So you can share your address?"

"Sure."

"Thanks. I'll be there to pick her up as soon as I can," Namjoon says before the line goes dead.

Taehyung stands up then, stretching his arms out. He takes a look around his apartment. It's pretty clean, save for the strange hooped earring on the rug. He tries to remember who it

could belong to, eventually giving up when he realizes he can't remember a single face out of all the girls he's fucked over the past week. The few he'd bothered to exchange numbers with have their contacts saved as one worders or even a score.

His phone vibrates.

Unknown Number: Hi, this is Daeun

Me: Hey, Namjoon called. Come over

Me: [Address]

Me: It's apartment 402. Building's right next to Treat Street Bistro

Unknown Number: Got it

Me: Where are you?

Taehyung pauses as he types out the next message, thinking. He ends up sending it anyway.

Me: Want me to come get you?

Unknown Number: No, that's fine. Be there in a few

Taehyung frowns. He somehow expected the other girl to jump at the chance.

Me: Cool. See you :)

Daeun arrives in 8 minutes. And when Taehyung pulls open the door, she doesn't look so good. Her skin is clammy and pale, and her eyes seem a little spaced out. Her posture is not as straight and confident as it was the last time they met, rather slumped. She's carrying a heavy book bag.

"Hi, come in," Taehyung greets, letting her in. She offers him a weak and reserved smile, walking in and pulling off her combat boots.

"I'm gonna sit down," she says before plopping down onto his couch, laying down over it. Her top stretches up her stomach with the movement, exposing a belly button piercing that glints in the sunlight streaming through Taehyung's window. Taehyung's open about the way he stares.

Daeun's eyes are closed, and her breathing is slightly shaky. She's got a hand on her chest like she's trying to slow down her heartbeat.

"You good?" Taehyung asks, leaning against the wall.

"Do I look good?" Daeun retorts, sarcastic. "I just need to catch my breath."

"Did something happen?" Taehyung prods.

"I'm diabetic," she responds, then explaining further. "My blood sugar crashed. The world starts to spin, everything starts blacking out."

"Damn. I wouldn't have been able to tell. You're pretty fit."

She opens her eyes then, frowning at him.

"It's not a visible disease. And I have type 1."

Taehyung nods in understanding.

“Do you really believe that everyone who has diabetes has lived on a diet of only sugared donuts and chocolate?” Daeun asks, her eyes closing once more. Her breathing slowly starts to even out.

Taehyung doesn’t respond, rather walking to his little kitchen and pulling open the fridge. He takes out 2 beers and returns to the living room, placing Daeun’s can on the coffee table and then opening his own.

“Have a beer,” Taehyung says, taking a sip. She sits up then albeit slowly, now seeming a lot better with the little cooldown. She picks up the cold can and wastes no time in opening it, taking a sip.

“Thanks,” she says. Taehyung just nods. He eventually sits down next to her, and she shuffles to make room for him.

“Namjoon’s pretty busy, huh? I know he’s out most days,” Taehyung asks, suddenly feeling very nosy. He leans back against the plush cushions of his couch, watching Daeun’s back where she leans a little upward, elbows resting on her knees. There’s a butterfly tattoo underneath her bra strap.

“Yeah, he is,” Daeun says. “He’s one of those go-getters. Never gets tired either.”

“You love him?” Taehyung asks. She turns to look at him then, a slight tilt of her head.

“I do,” she responds. “He’s done a lot for me.”

“How’d you guys meet?”

Daeun laughs then. “Why’re you so curious?”

“Your relationship is interesting to me.”

“That’s funny, coming from someone who can’t stand commitment. What’s so interesting about us?”

“The two of you just seem so different,” Taehyung responds. “He’s all warm lumberjack and you’re party goth.”

“You making fun of me?” She prods, raising an eyebrow.

Taehyung sits up then, and he places a hand on her thigh. It’s casual, the way he does it, as if simply just placing it there for support as he moves. Deep inside, he’s wondering whether this is something he really wants to do.

Does he really want to fuck Namjoon’s girlfriend?

“I’m not making fun of you,” he clarifies. “I just find this whole opposites attract thing intriguing. Makes me wonder if you’re compatible.”

Daeun’s leg flexes under his grip, and she looks at him. There’s something unreadable in her expression, but Taehyung thinks he can detect conflict. She’s considering it, whatever’s going on between them right now, and her vision does dip down to his lips for a fraction of a second. If Taehyung wasn’t so shrewd in picking up cues, he would’ve missed it.

The moment is broken when her phone starts to ring.

Daeun startles, and her thigh jerks out of Taehyung’s grip. She fumbles for her phone, and they both see the caller ID. It’s Namjoon, and she picks up in a flash.

“Hey,” she says, voice quiet. “Yeah, I’m fine. Got here in one piece.”

Taehyung can hear the muffled sound of Namjoon speaking on the other end.

“Yeah, I took the insulin too. I- what? No, I think I’m good for this month. Thank you, baby,” she continues, tilting her face away from Taehyung as she speaks into the phone.

He observes her body language, the way she seems more relaxed when she talks to Namjoon. They’re genuinely happy together, and it’s something Taehyung picked up on the first time they’d met too. He notices the way she rubs a hand down her thigh, over where Taehyung touched her, as if trying to erase it.

“No, you don’t need to pick me up from here,” she says, something tight in her voice. “I’ll be heading home in a few minutes. Yeah-” she smiles then. “Dinner sounds great.”

Taehyung returns to sinking back against the sofa, tilting his head up to look at the ceiling as Daeun wraps up the phone call. His mind is running, and he speaks the moment he knows she’s hung up.

“Is Namjoon paying for your meds?”

It’s a rude question, and rather invasive.

“What?” Daeun asks.

“I’m asking you if Namjoon’s buying your insulin shots for you. It sounded like that on the call,” Taehyung elaborates unabashedly. He knows insulin isn’t cheap.

“Yes, he is,” Daeun responds, expression unreadable once more.

“Is that what you meant when you said he does a lot for you? He pays your bills?” Taehyung asks.

“It’s not really any of your business,” she shoots back. There’s a tinge of guilt to her expression, like she’s having difficulty accepting what Taehyung’s saying.

“It’s just interesting. I’ve seen way too many relationships where money’s the only glue holding it together.”

“Well, we aren’t one of those,” Daeun states rather coldly. She stands up then, picking up her bag and walking toward the door where she pulls on her shoes. “I’m gonna head home now. Thanks for the beer, and for letting me come over to rest.”

“You’re welcome anytime,” Taehyung responds, having followed her to the foyer. “Just text. You have my number now.”

“Bye, Taehyung,” she says rather brusquely, opening the door and walking out. Taehyung watches till he sees her disappear into the elevator.

Chapter End Notes

And, that's the fourth chapter!! Thank you so SO much for reading!! I hope you enjoyed it.

I'm SOOOOOO excited to hear what you think so please feel free to leave a comment if you'd like to share your thoughts, favourite moments or anything you like with me! I haven't completed a story in a really long time and hearing from you would mean the world to me. Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all!!!

Chapter 5: Precipice

Chapter Notes

Here's the fifth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

Beautiful moodboard made by Ina (cappuccinokyu) <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Being home feels strange.

By now, he finds that he's used to and has grown to love the towering cityscape of Seoul. Tall glittering glass buildings, thriving nightlife, bright colourful LED screens. Home feels dated somehow. All he sees are short 2-3 story buildings at the max, small winding roads and the same mom and pop stores he's been visiting ever since he was a child. It's all exactly as it was when he'd left, stuck in time. All the same people, all the same streets.

His parents were busy, so they'd sent the family driver to pick him up from the train station. He has his headphones on, and is staring out the window. It's like time ticks by slower here.

Taehyung goes home to an empty house. It's quick, the way he dumps his suitcase in the foyer for his maid to take to his room. Maybe he runs upstairs and takes a fast shower too, wearing a nice shirt and trousers and spritzing on some cologne. Slicks his hair back slightly too, although a few strands slip down to frame his forehead anyway.

Taehyung feels alive when he goes down to the garage and gets his car. He'd left it here because he wasn't sure if there'd be room for a car at his apartment building, but he's definitely going to drive it back to Seoul.

He presses the button in the remote to open the garage door and speeds out, the engine revving heavily. He rolls the windows down too, somehow now glad to be back in the town where he's king. He stops on the way to buy roses and wine.

Taehyung has no qualms about pulling up right outside Jimin's front door. No more parking in the lane behind, a few houses down. It's not like Yoongi's here anyway, him having scored a big internship that keeps him busy even during holidays. He doesn't bother with calling Jimin to let him know he's here either.

The thing is, he's a day early. And he knows that Jimin is home alone. His parents are away to visit a sick aunt. He can see the light on in Jimin's room on the first floor.

Taehyung rings the doorbell. As much as he's never going to admit it, there's an excited anticipation bubbling up in his tummy. It grows, hot and cloying, as he hears Jimin rounding the stairs, and the shuffle of his feet and he starts to get the door open. He almost tuts when he realizes that Jimin didn't even look through the peephole. What if he was a murderer?

When Jimin opens the door, he seems to freeze upon seeing him. He's wearing a baggy tee and shorts. He drops his phone when instincts make him immediately bring his hands up to cover his mouth in shock. There's a cute butterfly clip keeping his bangs off his face.

"Oh my god!" He shrieks, hiccuping when Taehyung steps in and shuts the door behind him, placing the flowers and wine on the little table by the entrance.

He wraps his arms around Jimin's waist, picking him up and twirling him around. He's lighter, is the first thing he notices. Or maybe Taehyung's become stronger himself, what with his new exercise routine. Something in his heart swells up at the feeling of finally having Jimin in his arms.

"You're supposed to be here tomorrow!" Jimin exclaims in disbelief, his arms wrapped around his shoulders. "I haven't g-gotten ready or anything!" He follows the statement by clinging to him, squealing when Taehyung hoists him up higher, prompting him to wrap his legs around his waist.

"Happy to see me?" Taehyung asks, already carrying them up the stairs. If he notices Jimin's phone starting to vibrate on the foyer floor as they walk away, he doesn't bring it up.

"Of course," Jimin rushes to respond. Taehyung can hear his heartbeat thundering against his chest. "It's j-just, I'm not looking that great-"

Taehyung kicks open the door to Jimin's room, dropping him onto the bed and prying his hands away from his face. He notices the way there are papers and textbooks strewn all over the space, a scented candle lit on the bedside table. The only source of light is the lamp on his desk.

"Let me see you," Taehyung coaxes, straddling Jimin's narrow hips. It's criminally easy to pin his delicate wrists to the mattress, both of them fitting within the grasp of one of his hands. When Jimin doesn't comply, he turns his face toward him with a rough grip on his chin.

Jimin's got dark circles under his eyes, and there are 3 pimples on his face; one on his forehead and the other two on his left cheek. His lips are chapped, and his face seems gaunt.

Still, he's gorgeous.

"What's not beautiful about you, huh?" Taehyung asks, thumbing at his bottom lip. Jimin looks up at him, eyes wide and glassy. His wrists tense in Taehyung's grip, and his lashes flutter when his thumb dips into his mouth.

“I was going to put on some pimple patches, and wash my hair a-and-” Jimin winces when Taehyung’s hand travels up to find purchase in his hair, tugging.

“You like my surprise?” Taehyung asks, feeling giddy to finally have Jimin under him after 6 long months. Jimin nods immediately, his Adam's apple bobbing.

“You don’t seem too happy to see me, Jiminie,” Taehyung says. “You haven’t even given me a kiss yet.”

“You’re not letting me touch you,” Jimin responds, and Taehyung’s grip on his wrists grows tighter. The younger boy gasps when Taehyung tugs on his hair once more, greedy in the way he runs his hands up his t-shirt next, feeling his skin. The moment his fingers drift over Jimin’s nipple, he twists it, relishing the sharp inhale he receives in return.

“I missed you so much,” Jimin confesses, his eyes hazy. “I’ve been dreaming of seeing you again for so long now that I’m caught off guard by the fact that you’re finally here.”

“Mhmm,” Taehyung hums, continuing to drift his fingers over Jimin’s torso, shucking his t-shirt up in the process. “What’d you dream of?”

“Just seeing you, being able to be with you again,” Jimin responds, half rambles. The dim lights make him more beautiful somehow.

“Haven’t been thinking about other men while I’ve been gone, have you?” Taehyung half teases, although just the thought of it makes him feel like he’d go insane if it were true. His ego swells when Jimin shakes his head desperately, blubbering out a no.

“What’ve you been doing all evening?” Taehyung asks then.

“Studying.”

Oh, that's right. Jimin's college entrance exams must be right around the corner.

"All I do is study and miss you."

Taehyung smiles at that, finally leaning down and capturing Jimin's lips in a slow, deep kiss. He relishes the way Jimin whimpers into his mouth, his wrists going slack in his hold. There's a sense of reunion in their mingling hot breaths, the feeling of his plush lips against his. The other boy tilts his head back when Taehyung kisses down his neck, sucking a hickey into the tender spot underneath his ear. His chest tremors, and there's a searing hot blush high on his cheeks.

It finally feels like coming home when Taehyung's fucking him a mere fifteen minutes later.

Jimin's naked, skin splotched in bursts of uneven red across his body. Taehyung's still fully clothed for the most part, his shirt half off.

It's maddening, all of it. Could drive him to the brink of insanity; the tight grip of Jimin's hole around Taehyung's cock, the sounds, the view of his thin skin shifting over his fine bones when he arches his back, overcome in pleasure as he's split open on the thick girth of it. He runs his hands up Taehyung's arms and torso, anywhere he can reach, really. His pretty collarbones, catching dewdrops of the dim light of his study lamp, his plush mouth dropped open, pliant and waiting.

The way they kiss is filthy and wet, and Taehyung doesn't hold back when he grips Jimin's waist hard enough to leave deep bruises as he spears into him, pace never slowing down. He knows the zipper of his pants is probably chafing Jimin's bare skin. He imagines Jimin shifting his weight to put the pressure off the tender patch of skin during his exam, shuffling around in his chair.

He knows he's gotten stronger; can see it, in the way the generous fat of Jimin's ass ripples everytime their hips collide. Jimin seems to have noticed too, what with the way he was staring at his abs earlier, his fingers curling over Taehyung's significantly larger biceps. Jimin seems unable to catch his breath, gasping wildly everytime Taehyung slams into his tight hole.

Taehyung fucks him hard enough that Jimin will feel it in his bones for days to come. Almost wants to pull out and fuck his throat too, rattle his little skull, rid it of any thoughts that linger within.

Jimin starts to make the keening noise he usually does when he wants to change positions. Taehyung wastes no time before pulling out and laying down onto his back, yanking Jimin onto his body such that they're facing each other. Jimins straddles his hips and Taehyung fucks back into him in one smooth thrust, smirking when Jimin curls up into his chest, burying his face into his skin and wrapping his arms around him.

He fucks him until he's a drooling mess, jerked up his chest with every hard thrust. Jimin cums with a weak jerk, and Taehyung knots his fingers into his hair to keep him in place as he chases his own orgasm, spearing into him so hard his bones must ache. The pressure's building within him, raw and hot, and he grits his teeth once he reaches his peak, filling Jimin up the way he'd only been able to dream of all these months. He fucks Jimin through it too, settling for hard, deep thrusts rather than the animalistic pace he'd set earlier. There's a quickening in his heart, one that he's only found when they're together.

Once his breathing starts to even out, he noses at Jimin's hair, trying to get him to lift his head and look at him. He runs his hands down Jimin's back, fingers flexing when they reach his waist, thumbs digging into the tender skin.

"Baby?" He asks. He isn't a stranger to this, Jimin being quiet after sex. Sometimes when he's particularly emotional he tends to regress into something silent and timid. Taehyung's talked him out of those mental spaces before.

Jimin mumbles something.

"Hmm?" Taehyung asks, bringing his hands up to thumb at Jimin's cheeks. He tries to lift his face but Jimin keens in protest, burrowing his face back into Taehyung's neck.

"I didn't catch that, babe," Taehyung sighs.

“Was it good?” Jimin asks then, barely audible.

“Was what good?”

“What we did just now.”

Taehyung wasn’t expecting that. Still, he doesn’t hesitate before responding.

“Of course,” he answers. “Was it good for you?”

“Yes, it is. It always is,” Jimin responds. “Are you sure?”

“Yes. Why?”

Jimin starts to say something but Taehyung cuts him off.

“Louder. You’re mumbling.”

Jimin takes in a few erratic breaths before speaking.

“I was scared that you wouldn’t like me anymore. Or that you’d realize that you don’t like me as much after so long. I’ve been so anxious-”

“About what?”

“That you’ll find someone else. Or start liking someone else. Seoul is full of gorgeous models-”

Suddenly it makes sense. Jimin’s insecurity about his appearance, the way he was hiding his face from Taehyung’s view.

“Like I’d ever look at anyone except you,” Taehyung cuts in once more. It’s so believable, the way he says it. “I don’t care if Seoul’s full of models. You’re all I see. No one’s more beautiful than you are.”

It is true. There’s something about Jimin that appeals and sates the synapses of Taehyung’s complex brain. He’s extremely attracted to him, and that hasn’t died down for a bit in the 2 years he’s had him. Sure, he always wants more, and quenches that thirst in the bodies of other people. But it’s always going to be true that he’ll never feel for anyone the way he does for Jimin. It’s difficult to put into words. He’s the only one to hold Taehyung’s interest for so long.

“You really mean that?” Jimin asks, still not looking at him just yet. Taehyung lets him get away with it.

“I don’t want anyone but you,” Taehyung adds, easily slipping into the role of Jimin’s perfect boyfriend. “I’ve never looked at anyone else, and I’m never going to. I’m committed to us.”

Lying has always come easily to him. And there’s never any guilt. Not even now.

“But you’ll only see me once or twice a year-”

“Until you come to Seoul, right?” Taehyung fills in. It’s an easy habit, interrupting Jimin. The younger boy always lets him get away with it too. “You’re giving your entrance exams soon. It'll barely be a few months after that. We’ll be together then.”

Taehyung is excited about it. Having Jimin within close reach again, in a big city where

restrictions aren't as tight. Jimin will probably stay in the dorms that typically have a curfew, so it won't be restrictive and Taehyung will be free to do as he pleases after a certain time. He isn't sure if Jimin's aiming for KU, but-

"I guess so," Jimin concedes, timid. And then he shudders, inhaling a relieved breath as he clings to Taehyung tighter. "I'm glad that you still love me. I always feel so safe around you. I've been so stressed with exam prep, and my parents telling me that I need to do well. Yoongi hyung got into a great university so I have to too. Now that you're here, I'm finally able to breathe."

"I'll always love you," Taehyung says.

"Promise me that you always will," Jimin whispers. "Promise that you won't forget me."

Taehyung pulls Jimin's hand out from where it's sandwiched between their bodies, holding his limp wrist and intertwining their pinkies.

"I promise."

-

Taehyung's two week break flies by.

Somehow, everything feels dated. When he'd met the rest of his friend group who'd returned for the holidays too, they all laughed boisterously about how it feels like they'd never left. Taehyung feels the opposite, but neglects to mention it in favour of keeping spirits high at their gettogether. He even finds out about the fact that Taeil dropped out of his university, opting to return and take over his family grocery store after his father passed away unexpectedly a few months ago. Taehyung thinks about how the other boy was extremely popular and lived a thrilling life back when they were in school, now settled to live as a grocer. He seems happy, but it puts a bitter taste in Taehyung's mouth.

Taehyung doesn’t ever want to settle down.

Never.

He wants the high. Wants the thrill. Never wants it to end, or slow down.

On his last night before returning to Seoul, Taehyung sleeps at Jimin’s. It’s not like his parents would notice his absence anyway. Jimin cooks for him and they laugh and play some silly online games on Jimin’s laptop. They’re laying on their stomachs on his comfy bed, shoulders pressed together.

“I would’ve brought my laptop if I knew you wanted to play,” Taehyung says, mildly irritated at Jimin’s old and cheaper system. It keeps hanging.

“I’m sorry,” Jimin responds, sounding embarrassed. “I’m saving up to get a new one for university.”

“How’s that going?”

“It’s going fine. I'm babysitting again. My parents gave me some money for my birthday so that’s all gone into the fund too. I should be able to get it for myself next month if all goes well.”

Taehyung nods silently before he freezes.

“Fuck,” he curses. “Jimin, I-” he stops, truly not knowing what to say. For the first time ever, he’s fumbling for words.

He forgot Jimin’s birthday. It was over a month ago.

He’s never forgotten before.

“It’s fine,” Jimin responds, voice quiet. His eyes are on the screen but the smile that was on his face has dimmed.

“Why didn’t you say anything?”

“Why would I?” Jimin answers, tone blank. “You hadn’t texted me in a week and a half. And afterward I found out you had an exam and your swim meet. I know how busy school is for you. So it’s fine. You were busy.”

Taehyung’s always done a lot for Jimin’s birthday since they’d met. Makes a whole show of it, flowers, wine, gifts, surprises, expensive dinners. He’s addicted to seeing Jimin fall in love with him, and wants to feel like he’s a miracle in his life.

And now, he’d forgotten. The worst part is, Taehyung doesn’t quite remember what swim meet and exam Jimin’s talking about. He must’ve just used those as an excuse for why he didn’t call. Flimsy lies.

“Let’s not talk about this anymore,” Jimin suddenly says. He resumes the game, playing and neglecting to say anything when Taehyung fails to join him.

Knowing Jimin, he would’ve cried. He would’ve waited by the phone all day. Maybe even have thought or hoped that Taehyung would come down to surprise him. All while Taehyung was probably out fucking someone he doesn’t even remember.

Taehyung leans forward and kisses the bare skin of his shoulder that peeks out of his tank top.

“I’m sorry,” he says, words disappearing into Jimin’s skin. He throws an arm around his back, nuzzling into his neck.

“You’ve been saying that a lot,” Jimin responds. “You don’t have anything to be sorry for. You were busy and you forgot. That’s that. I understand, don’t worry.”

“Jimin-”

“Today’s our last night together. Please let’s not talk about this?” Jimin requests, still not looking at him.

Taehyung wants to insist, but eventually relents.

“I can’t wait for you to come to Seoul,” he says instead, reaching out a large hand and shutting Jimin’s laptop, ignoring the other boy’s whining at his lost highscore. Taehyung turns Jimin over and crawls over him, leaning down to suck a dark hickey into his collarbone.

Jimin’s trembling hands come to rest lightly at his shoulders, and the touch unlocks a memory in Taehyung’s brain. Of the first time they’d been intimate. It was right here in this same room, on this same bed, 3 months after their first date. Jimin had been so awkward, his hands hovering over Taehyung’s frame, not quite touching, because he didn’t know what to do with them. Inexperienced in every way. It shouldn’t have been so appealing to Taehyung, Jimin’s untainted worldview, but it was.

“Gonna have you to myself all day every day,” he continues, running his hands up Jimin’s baggy t-shirt. He pinches his waist lightly. “My sweet Jimin. All mine.”

Jimin inhales sharply at that, gripping him tighter. His breathing is short, head tipped back as Taehyung licks up his throat, leaving bursts of mottled purple across Jimin’s neck.

“I’ll miss you so much. And soon, I won’t have to anymore.”

Jimin smiles at that, finally giving in and letting his arms rest around Taehyung's back in a loose embrace. Things don't progress beyond that, and they mostly spend the rest of the night in each other's arms. Taehyung doesn't realize when he falls asleep, always slipping off easily in Jimin's presence.

The next morning, Taehyung returns to Seoul.

He unpacks quickly, putting the leftovers Jimin packed for him in the fridge. He texts the other boy to let him know he's arrived safely, lazing the day away. He heads to a club later.

That same night, Taehyung doesn't hear his phone ringing amongst the sounds of his bed frame slamming against the wall. The vibrations make the device slip off the little table it's on, falling onto the wrinkled lump of a bodycon dress that's strewn over the floor.

Jimin's contact picture is bright on his screen, a shy picture of him smiling that Taehyung took of him one random Wednesday in high school.

It rings and rings, until it doesn't anymore.

-

Taehyung finally touches base with Hyungsoo, his school friend who didn't make the trip back for their break.

He met up with him last night for dinner, and ate a free meal at his family's restaurant. It was nice touching base, and they promised to meet regularly. It's clear that Hyungsoo misses home. Taehyung can't say he shares the same sentiment.

One thing Taehyung has noticed about the dynamic of his university is that there aren't clear cut groups. People float in between friends and don't stick to just one particular set. If you

think about it, Taehyung has tons of friends right now. There are always people texting him and inviting him out, wanting to meet. But he's only made a few real connections, and even those seem deeper than any he's held with his friends from school.

Okay, maybe it's just one connection. And should it count? It's Namjoon, after all. Taehyung finds himself being authentically happy around him, in a way he's never felt around his other childhood friends, cousins, or even his parents for that matter. He does respect him, and it's somehow interesting to spend so much time with someone that Taehyung doesn't think he's superior to. Being narcissistic does have its low points, Taehyung's come to discover.

They're playing video games right now at Namjoon's spacious apartment, a tad bigger than his own. Namjoon has always been well off, and used to stay in one of the biggest houses in their neighbourhood back home before he moved. It was slightly larger than Taehyung's, with a sprawling driveway and a large wrought iron gate that only opened remotely, high stone walls round the perimeter and a large yard. It was a traditional European style home while Taehyung's was and still is all modern glass and sharp edges. They used to play with Namjoon's golden retriever puppy Daisy there, who is now a happy senior dog living in Hong Kong with Namjoon's parents.

Taehyung wins another round of their shooter game. Namjoon groans, flinging his controller away and watching as it bounces off the cushions of the sofa adjacent to them. They've played 8 games, and Namjoon's lost every one.

"You suck at this," Taehyung laughs, shoving his shoulder. "Why'd you even get these consoles?"

Namjoon does suck at video games. He has all the consoles, but it's very evident that he doesn't really use them. His fingers are sluggish on the controller like they would be if he were someone only just introduced to gaming.

"Daeun likes games," Namjoon responds just as he stands up to head over to the kitchen. He pulls open the fridge, scouring for a snack.

"You got all of these just for her?" Taehyung prods, eyebrows raised. He watches as Namjoon's built frame stands up straight before he returns to the living room, holding a massive tub of ice cream. Taehyung says no when he's offered some.

“Yeah,” Namjoon answers, like there’s nothing odd about it. It’s disgusting how in love they are. And it’s interesting, learning more and more about how so much of Daeun’s happiness and life lies in Namjoon’s calloused yet still somehow gentle hands. There are a few pictures of them on the wall.

“Where is she?” Taehyung asks.

“Oh, she’s at some party with her art friends,” Namjoon responds, relaxed as he digs into his rocky road frozen treat. “Won’t be back until late.”

There’s an idea prickling its way into Taehyung’s brain.

“Hmm,” is all he says, for now.

Namjoon puts on a movie then, and an hour passes. It’s comfortable, just their light chatter or the odd joke one of them makes about the plot or characters. It’s an evening Taehyung would’ve typically enjoyed amidst his usual thriving and overzealous social life. But there’s a nagging in his mind, and it won’t go away.

Namjoon pauses the movie in the middle.

“Let’s order dinner. Are you in the mood for chicken? I know this amazing 24/7 place-”

“Actually, I can’t stay, hyung,” Taehyung says. “I gotta head home. Have early morning practice tomorrow.”

“Oh, that sucks.” Namjoon pouts. “You could’ve stayed over, it’s already pretty late. The forecast says it might rain soon too.”

He’s right. He could’ve, and it would’ve been a nice time too.

“Ah, I don’t do sleepovers,” Taehyung laughs, already standing up and heading to the foyer. Namjoon follows to see him off, ever the good host.

“Now that you say it, you never did even when we were younger,” the other man muses aloud. “Why’s that?”

“I just like sleeping in my own bed, and I need my space,” Taehyung responds straightly. It’s the truth. He could never sleep in the same bed with someone else, and doesn't want to. Jimin’s the first person.

Namjoon just smiles lazily. “Cool.”

“Bye, hyung. Let’s do this again next weekend if you’re free?”

“Sure.”

Taehyung leaves then, flashing Namjoon a warm smile as he enters the elevator. As soon as he’s out of the building and walking towards his car, he opens his phone and searches up Daeun’s account. She has 2, one that’s private for her personal posts (Taehyung hasn’t followed that one) and a public one for her art. She’s already been tagged in a few stories, and it should be criminal, how easy it is to find the location of the party. It’s at this warehouse on the outskirts that’s been converted to be a popular venue for raves, and he thinks he might’ve gone there before.

Taehyung abandons his car and takes a taxi. On the way there, his phone vibrates.

Minnie: Hi

Minnie: Sorry for not texting earlier, I was so tired that I fell asleep as soon as I got home :(

Minnie: But….

Me: But what, baby?

Minnie: :(
Minnie: I always blush when you call me that

Minnie: But…my entrance exams are finally over!!!!!! °₊✧ヽ(⁰▽⁰)ノ✧₊°

Shit. Was that today?

Me: Congrats

Me: How'd they go?

Minnie: They went great, actually!!! I was so nervous about it that I was hallucinating giving the exam in my dreams last night. But I knew all the answers and I'm very confident that it went well. I even cross checked answers with Jieun and she's a really good student so I know I got mostly everything right!!! (๑ˆ▽ˆ)و

Minnie: I feel like I can finally breathe hhhhhhhhhh

Minnie: I guess this is what happens when you have nothing to do but study

Me: I'm so proud of you

Minnie: Thank you <3 If you were here we could celebrate

Minnie: Hyung surprised me this morning

Me: What?

Minnie: Yeah!!!! He's going to drive us to the beach and we'll stay in a hotel and eat lots of seafood to celebrate!!! I've been wanting to do it for so long now, been bugging him about it

It's visceral, the scathing gash in his ego. His fingers dig into the screen, jaw clenching.

Taehyung doesn't want Jimin to go to the beach with Yoongi. He wants Jimin to stay at home in his little room and spend his time missing him, just as he always does. *Of course* Yoongi would swoop in and be the hero. Fucking typical.

Me: Why didn't you bug me?

Minnie: You're so busy, Tae…

Minnie: And I'm pretty sure I did mention it to you before

Me: I don't know why you keep bringing this stuff up to me. You're clearly trying to make me feel bad.

Me: Are you trying to make me feel guilty because I forgot your birthday? Is that what's going on?

Jimin takes a while to respond.

Minnie: I really don't know how you could take offence to me telling you about my brother surprising me with a trip I've always wanted to go on

Taehyung was expecting an apology, or Jimin's usual timid way of defusing the situation and appeasing his irrational behaviour. Not this.

Me: Cut the fucking attitude

Minnie: Why are you ruining this for me?

For you? It's not yours. Nothing is yours. You're not yours. You're mine. You don't get to have fun without me. You don't get to find comfort in anyone but me. You don't smile without me, and you don't breathe without me. You'll do what I want you to do, feel what I want you to feel. None of that is up for debate, it never was. You don't exist without me.

The thought process is so clear in Taehyung's mind.

But he can't type it.

Jimin's been acting out a lot lately. But Taehyung can't risk pissing him off too much, not till he's within close reach and can be disciplined. It would be too easy for Jimin to distance himself with how far apart they already are, even though he knows that Jimin is heavily attached to him.

For now, he'll let it slide. Just a few more months, and it'll be easier. It's worth the wait. It always has been. The moment he's here in Seoul, under his thumb, he'll correct this behaviour.

Me: I'm just kidding

Jimin's typing for a few seconds.

Minnie: Are you sure…?

Me: Yeah

Me: Have fun, baby

Minnie: Tae

Minnie: I think we should talk about this

Minnie is typing…

"Sir, we're here," his Uber driver announces. Taehyung then realizes that the car's stationary now, and they're right outside the warehouse. He'd been so caught up that he hadn't even realized.

Taehyung gets out of the car and pockets his phone, ignoring the incessant vibrations that signal Jimin's incoming messages. Maybe his lack of response would prompt Jimin to think about what he's done, and why it's wrong. Why the same standards don't apply to both of them.

It's cold, is the first thing he notices, and the grey clouds in the sky are evident even though it's nightfall. Namjoon's forecast was right, it might rain soon. He can see the warehouse from where he stands, several cars parked haphazardly around it. It looks nondescript but you can hear the thumping of bass from within, some flashing lights peeking through the gaps under the doors and through the little greasy windows. It's just pushing midnight.

Taehyung pushes the door open and walks in, and it's packed. The music is so loud that it echoes in his heart, and the strobe lights would make anyone dizzy, flashing a million different colours every second. The air is hazy with smoke and everyone's wearing glow stick necklaces and bracelets, jumping with the music.

The moment he's a few steps in, his eyes scanning the crowd, a hand curls around his upper arm.

He turns to see a man, tall and spindly. He's wearing a sheer mesh top and tight leather pants, hair dyed and face heavily painted with bright makeup. He disgusts Taehyung. The way he presents himself, acting like a desperate whore. No respect for himself.

Before he can yank his arm away, the man slips something into his palm. It's an LSD patch.

“Everyone gets one,” the man whispers in his ear, his eyes tracing over his features. “You’re so handsome.”

Taehyung pockets it, and smiles.

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. Are you new? I haven’t seen you-”

The other man’s words die in his throat as Taehyung grabs his wrist and twists it painfully, causing him to yelp before he gives him a light yet threatening shove in warning, sending him stumbling back.

“I’m not a faggot,” Taehyung spits before leaving, threading his way into the crowd as he looks for a specific face. It’s not an unfamiliar experience, the writhing mess of bodies dancing, pushing and pressing around him. His eyes scan every woman he sees, looking for a pixie cut and a butterfly tattoo.

The air is thick, humid and sticky. He can barely see a few feet ahead of him yet he keeps walking, the contact high from the weed in the air mellowing his vision round the edges.

Eventually, he sees Daeun.

She’s right in the centre, dancing with a group of other girls. There’s some neon paint splattered over face yet it looks purposeful somehow, and Taehyung eyes her familiar silhouette.

He presses up behind her and wraps his arms around her waist.

Daeun stiffens immediately, her hand coming down to dig her nails into his wrist to ward him off. When she turns to see who it is, her eyes widen and she pulls away immediately.

“Taehyung? What the fuck?” she demands but her words are slurred.

“Hi, Daeun,” Taehyung greets, pulling her closer now that they’re face to face. He thumbs at her waist that peeks out of her crop top.

“What are you doing here?” she asks again, her vision dipping down to where his hands lie on her bare skin. She doesn’t pry them off, and there’s that emotion in her eyes again. Conflict.

“I came to see you.”

She huffs, chuckling although she doesn’t seem to find any of this funny.

“No. This isn’t happening, Taehyung. Find someone else.”

“I don’t want anyone else.”

“I’m your best friend’s girlfriend,” she states, somehow seeming more sober. She finally pulls away from him, weaving her way through the crowd as she leaves the dance floor. Taehyung follows, grabbing her wrist before she makes it out. The song changes and the crowd grows wild. Daeun’s pushed into his chest and they’re trapped.

“Why are you doing this?” she asks, seeming resigned somehow, her lips right by his ear due to the way they’re pressed together.

“Because I want to.”

As easy as that.

“I love him,” she says, and it sounds almost pleading. “He’s my everything.”

Caring, doting, responsible and safe Namjoon.

It’s useless.

“Yet you want to fuck me.”

She doesn’t deny it. Taehyung mouths at the skin below her ear and she trembles, manicured nails fisting into his shirt.

“He’s not here,” Taehyung coaxes and her breath hitches. “He’ll never find out.”

He pulls away so he can see her face, just as he reaches into his pocket for the LSD patch.

All he gets is a glimpse of her hesitant yet expectant expression before he slips the drug into his mouth and kisses her, moving to the beat of the music. She’s responsive, and they trade the patch between them till it melts.

Things get hazy from that point onward, his skin searing hot and his mind unravelling.

Everything feels heavenly.

-

Taehyung wakes up to a sharp headache thundering in his temples, his mouth dryer than a desert. There's a metallic taste that clings to his tongue, and his fingers and toes are tingling. He knows he's home, because it smells like home and the feeling of the sheets underneath him is familiar to his fingers.

He doesn't even remember making it back home.

There's the sound of a belt clinking and he opens his burning eyes, turning to see Daeun stumbling into her jeans by the bed. She's still naked for the most part, only in her underwear.

"Morning," he greets, voice raspy.

He has blurry memories of what happened the previous night. He was high as a kite, seeing a million different things at once. They'd danced and made out and fucked in the dirty bathroom. They must've come back to Taehyung's and fucked again, judging by their state. He's glad that she was already up before him because he wouldn't have been too happy about seeing her sleeping in his bed.

Daeun jumps when she hears him, startling. She turns around, and she looks to not be doing too well either. Her arm comes up to cover her chest awkwardly before she turns back around and finds her bra, putting it on.

"Hi," she says, tentative.

"Going somewhere?"

She gulps, and the air is stilted.

"Y-Yeah. I gotta get home and shower before I meet Namjoon." She grimaces as she says her boyfriend's name.

“Hmm,” Taehyung muses. He decides to be direct.

“Do you regret it?”

Daeun’s face washes out slightly, paling. She shifts on her feet and when it’s evident that she’s not going to answer, Taehyung speaks.

“I don’t regret it,” he says.

She doesn’t respond.

Taehyung smirks, sitting up and leaning back onto his headboard.

“There’s nothing wrong with it, don’t look so guilty,” he says when he sees her ashen expression. Her delicate features are pinched, her hands hovering uselessly as she gets herself ready.

“There’s nothing wrong with cheating?” She asks then, raising an eyebrow.

“Just do what you want to do. That’s how I live,” Taehyung answers, getting out of bed and pulling on a pair of sweats. “Stay for breakfast? I-”

“I’m gonna go.” The words are rushed, troubled. “See you later. And please don’t…please don’t tell.”

Taehyung smiles.

“Of course not. He’s my close friend, you know. I would never hurt him that way.”

There’s something odd in the way Daeun looks at him then. Like he’s a wild animal, something she cannot understand. Like she’s underestimated how truly fucked up he is, and now it’s too late because she’s already shattered the foundation of her relationship. It’s the kind of expression that Taehyung likes to see. He likes manipulating people, and affecting them. There’s something so satisfying and cathartic about taking something so precious from Namjoon. A sort of accomplishment, because he needs to be able to have everything. Nothing is out of his reach. Absolutely nothing.

Daeun leaves then, and it’s similar to how it was the first time she was here.

Taehyung smiles to himself as he makes breakfast, humming a happy tune.

Me: Hi baby, sorry I fell asleep. I really was kidding, hope you enjoy your trip with your hyung!

Me: I miss you

-

Jimin calls one evening.

“Hey, baby,” Taehyung says, looking at the video feed of Jimin’s sweet *sweet* face. His cheeks are pink and his eyes are starry, something jittery in his disposition. “Someone’s in a good mood,” Taehyung adds.

“I’m in the best mood,” Jimin responds quietly, biting his lip to squash down a smile. It seems difficult, like he’s trying to build suspense and failing.

“Why’s that?” Taehyung asks, glad that he had the time to answer the call. He has exams right now and finally, it isn’t a lie. He feels some of the stress melt away at the sight of

Jimin's slightly crooked smile, his twinkling eyes. He's cute. He's so cute. He tells him. "You're so cute."

Jimin blushes even further then.

"Well…" he starts off, almost squirming. "I guess I'll be seeing you in Seoul in 3 months."

Taehyung does jump. He does feel the wave of excitement, the satisfaction.

"What?" He half yells. "Where? Where'd you get in?"

Jimin must've gotten admission to one of the smaller universities around the outskirts. They're not too particular about grades, and offer scholarships to smarter students who can't afford the fees-

"SNU."

Something freezes in Taehyung's chest.

Jimin squeals right after, dropping his phone onto his bed and burying his face into his hands as he smothers an excited scream.

"I got into SNU!!!!!!"

SNU?

The best university in their country? With an acceptance rate of below 1%?

“What-” Taehyung asks, genuinely shocked. He didn’t know Jimin was that smart.

“I got a scholarship!!! 60 percent! I’ll have to work to cover the rest but I don’t even care! I ranked 5th in the country in the exams!!!!! I feel like I’m dreaming, Tae~”

Taehyung’s genuinely impressed. Jimin has always been a silly little thing to him. And it’s perfect, he’d only be a 30-minute drive away. Close, but far enough that Taehyung wouldn’t have to worry about him seeing anything he doesn’t want him to see.

“I can’t wait to see you,” Taehyung says with a wide smile. “I’m so proud of you. Congratulations, Jiminie.”

“Thank you,” Jimin smiles, seeming relieved and happy to the point of tears. “No more long distance. I’ll be with you again.”

“You’ll always be with me. My pretty little wife.”

Jimin’s mouth gapes open before it spreads into a dazzling smile, giddy high pitched laughter leaving his lips. Taehyung breathes him in, drinking in every little sound and inch of his face. There’s a fluttering in his heart, one that isn’t toxic and dark. It’s lighter and sweet, something healthy and pure. He can’t help but smile too, somehow glad to have caused such a happy reaction.

“You’re so funny,” Jimin says once he’s done laughing.

“Wasn’t joking.”

“I love you, Tae,” Jimin says then, softer.

“I love you too,” Taehyung confesses, smiling. It’s a new era, a new beginning to their relationship, he thinks. Seoul is bigger, wider, freer; there’s so much more fun they can have.

Outside the juvenile safety of school and their little town, of controlling families and the limits of discipline.

Or maybe, it’s the beginning of the end.

And neither of them knows it.

Also, I just wanted to say that I'm going through a sort of rough patch in my life right now that is draining my energy. I'm sorry if I don't respond to all comments but please know that I deeply value, cherish and look forward to each one and that your kind words mean the whole world to me and are what's keeping me going right now. Please don't think I'm ignoring you :(I am reading each and every one and deeply value all of them, and I am so grateful for you taking the time out to write to me. I apologize if it's come across any other way, it was not my intention. Please do not be rude to me. I have disabled guest commenting for now.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the fifth chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 6: Splinter

Chapter Notes

> Here's the sixth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading. This is the LAST slow chapter as things progress majorly the next chapter onwards...
>
> Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!
>
> I hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Taehyung and Daeun get along.

It's not love. It's not even attraction that goes beyond the bed. But there is a certain understanding between them that Taehyung can't put a word to. They're not the same, far from it. But Taehyung thinks that Daeun's seen enough such that their situation isn't something that would shock her into change.

She does cry, sometimes. After they have sex. Taehyung lets her have that time to herself, pulling on his clothes and walking into the kitchen to grab a drink, usually. She'll be fine in a few minutes, and they'll either chat for a little while or she'll leave.

Daeun is tough, but she's not at the same time. She feels guilty, but not enough to stop her from doing what she's doing. It's an inexplicable part of her personality, and Taehyung respects her for honouring it. It's interesting.

"Why don't you want to date?" She asks him one evening. "Doesn't everyone want someone they can rely on?"

It's raining and they're holed up in Taehyung's apartment. They're sitting on opposite ends of the couch, no innate need to be close. There's an obscure movie playing on his TV.

"I don't rely on anyone," Taehyung responds. "I'm emotionally secure. I don't need to find that in someone else."

Daeun doesn't respond, so he speaks.

"You rely on Namjoon."

Taehyung never shies away from talking about it, bringing the sweltering truth down to every moment he sees appropriate. He's okay with talking about it, but he's noticed the light in Daeun's eyes dying every time she's reminded.

She’s silent, but she nods.

“He does love you,” he says.

“And I love him,” Daeun says quickly, almost desperate. “I love him.”

“Oh, I don’t doubt it,” he says. “But why do you love him?”

“He’s everything I’m not,” she says, and it isn’t the answer Taehyung was expecting. “He’s good-natured, kind, and so caring. He isn’t closed off like I am, or desperate to prove something. I think that comes with growing up secure. When I’m with him, I feel like I could be that way too. And he makes me feel like I’m not some broken girl who’s desperate to make it, but someone whole and worthy of love.”

“That’s interesting,” Taehyung says. “I do get what you mean.”

“I know you think I’m with him just because he pays for my meds, but it’s so much more than that. It’s always been. The moment he knew I was sick and was struggling to pay my bills, he told me not to worry about anything. He comes with me to the doctor and always looks after me. I just feel so safe when I’m with him. Like nothing could happen to me as long as he’s around. We met at one of my exhibitions.”

“Yet it isn’t enough,” Taehyung says, pointing out the cold truth.

“It is,” she says. “I just don’t deserve him. It’s complicated, it’s so complicated. I don’t know why I am the way I am.”

He does understand. Perhaps without the guilt.

Taehyung thinks about Jimin. Poor, sweet Jimin who loves Taehyung with everything he has. Whenever he's with Jimin, he doesn't feel like anything's missing. He feels whole, every nerve in his body set alight. Everything Jimin does provokes a whole and full-bodied response in him, be it lust or anger or what he's terrified to label as love.

The rest of it, everything he does, can't be routed to Jimin not being enough. Maybe if he was dating Daeun, or any girl back from school, it would be easier to explain. He'd be bored, and it's very unlikely that any potential love or genuine interest in them would hold him back.

But Jimin…he's always been different. He's always been Taehyung's.

Even as he thinks about him right now, about his sunny smile and soft hair, the dips of his waist and the soft fat of his thighs, something in his heart constricts. Just the way it did back when he first saw him, when he had his first taste of him, breaking him apart and putting him back together an infinite amount of times. Making him whole, just as he makes Taehyung whole, makes him feel like there's something worth investing time and effort into.

Taehyung doesn't think they've yet settled from their honeymoon phase. Jimin, he's more than enough. Sometimes he makes him feel things that he can't put a lid on. But Taehyung is a bottomless pit that constantly needs to be fed with attention, praise, awe, and control. And the berth for that is far too wide for Jimin to fill, wider now that they're far apart.

Jimin Jimin Jimin.

Jimin and his sweet voice and soft cheeks. Jimin and his endearingly round eyes that are filled with twinkling stars, and a certain type of innocent light that's sure to die when he discovers the truth about his perfect yet volatile boyfriend.

"We're so fucked up, aren't we?"

Taehyung can't bring himself to deny it.

-

The months breeze by and before Taehyung knows it, Jimin's in Seoul.

Taehyung was the one to get him from the train station. Drove his car there that Jimin's sat in hundreds of times before, fetched him and his bags. He kissed him hungrily as soon as they were in the safety of the vehicle, although Jimin hugged him for at least a minute back at the platform. He ran towards him, face lighting up like a Christmas tree.

His hand's on Jimin's thigh, stroking the bare skin since he's wearing a cute pair of linen shorts. The younger boy's wearing a nice t-shirt too, lavender with an embroidered breast pocket. Probably wanted to don a nice outfit to enter the city looking his best.

"Do you like it?" Taehyung asks, occasionally looking at Jimin to drink in his reaction as he looks at Seoul through the car windows.

"Yes," Jimin responds immediately, watching all the people and the lights and the tall buildings. "It's so *alive*."

Taehyng laughs, his fingers finding Jimin's slim wrist and bringing it up to kiss his palm.

They reach Jimin's dorm, and Taehyung helps him check in, hovering over his shoulder as he fills out his forms and the like. The receptionist chances a few looks at him, obviously curious about their relationship. They're evidently not brothers, because they look nothing alike. Taehyung stares back, his chest melded to Jimin's back, one hand on his waist and the other holding Jimin's suitcases.

It's easier because no one knows him here. Certainly not a middle-aged woman, nor all of the wide eyed freshmen pouring in with their parents. None of them chance them a look, more preoccupied with their own new beginning. At the very least, the dorm is beautiful. It's a red-brick building on campus, flanked by tall green trees with a gorgeous view.

Jimin's done soon enough, and all he has to do now is move in. He clings to Taehyung's arm as they walk down the corridors and travel up the elevator, scouring the hallways for Jimin's room. It's all smooth tiles and wide bright windows, a nice kind of quiet that Taehyung's not used to.

They find his room, and Jimin's roommate isn't here yet. It's decently sized and they're quick to move his things to the bed that's poised near the big window in the cosy corner. Jimin takes his time arranging his little lamp and trinkets over the desk, kneeling over the bare mattress as he puts up some cute posters of anime on the wall. Taehyung does the heavy lifting, slipping the few appliances onto the shelves and lifting the bed frame and desk so Jimin can sweep away any dust beforehand.

It's adorable, the way Jimin makes his bed, plump lips pushed out into a pouty beak as he spreads out wrinkles and tucks in the sheets. The way he starts to arrange his big fluffy cushions and plushies around as if creating a cocoon. There are a few new ones, some Jimin must've bought for his new home. He sees Jimin's shiny new laptop perched on his desk.

"Now that the bed's ready…" Taehyung murmurs suggestively, snaking his arms around Jimin's waist and mouthing at the back of his neck. He grinds his hard cock against Jimin's plush ass, having been turned on the moment they were alone together.

Jimin shudders, leaning back into him. He makes a desperate little sound that makes his dick twitch.

"Walking around in these tight little shorts," Taehyung breathes raspily into his ear, moving a hand back to grope his ass. "So fucking sexy."

"S-Should I shower first? I should get fresh after the train journey and moving in, I-"

Taehyung pushes him lightly, making Jimin fall face first into his soft bed. He straddles the backs of his thighs, rolling his hips into his clothed ass. Jimin muffles a moan into his fluffy pillow, stubby fingers fisting into the sheets.

"We can fuck now, and we can also fuck after your shower. During too."

Jimin doesn't protest, making cute breathy little sounds every time Taehyung thrusts forward.

It's rushed, the way they christen Jimin's new room.

All Taehyung does is tug those sinful little shorts down along with Jimin's underwear, just low enough that it bunches underneath the fat of his ass. He pops open the brand new bottle of lube Jimin brought with him, and stretches him out on 4 fingers till he's drooling. And then he's shoving in, his own cock pulled out of the fly of his jeans.

The bed frame rattles, slamming against the freshly painted wall. Taehyung wonders if the sounds echo through the door and into the corridor. Will Jimin's new neighbours and their parents hear them, wonder who the slut who lives in room 320 is? Not even a day in and already getting fucked within an inch of his life. Is this what he's come to South Korea's best university to do? Be a mindless whore?

The filthy thoughts flow through Taehyung's mind and spread like bubbling lascivious honey, hot and potent. He won't say them aloud, because Jimin genuinely doesn't enjoy any form of dirty talk that goes beyond filthy and depraved praise.

Jimin mewls against the sheets, fingers fisted and the back of his neck a sweaty, glowing pink. His ears are fiery red, his lower back arched cutely to present himself for Taehyung to take, take and take. Taehyung stares at where they're connected, the easy, slick slide of his cock into his waiting hole. Jimin's puffy rim is stretched taut around his thick girth, velvety soft inside, and there's a delicious tremor of pleasure that runs up Taehyung's spine when he revels in the way his hole grips every inch, every ridge of his length. He pushes in till his hips are pressed against Jimin's ass, every inch of his cock swallowed by his hole.

No one could ever take him as well as Jimin does. The mind numbing, nerve burning sensation of it is unique, exclusive only to him.

Taehyung grits his teeth, slamming into him harder, the wet squelch of lube music to his ears. Jimin whines and pushes his ass up higher, and Taehyung adjusts to an angle that makes Jimin squeal, his right leg quivering with every thrust.

It builds and builds, threatening to boil over, the furnace in his gut.

Three, four more thrusts and he's spilling into him with a shuddering exhale, leaning forward and slumping over Jimin's back. It's an orgasm that knocks the breath out of his lungs, and they're both sweaty and heaving for oxygen.

"Tae," Jimin whines. "You're heavy."

Taehyung chuckles, kissing the back of his neck and giving the shell of his ear a playful nibble. He rolls off Jimin and onto his back, pulling the younger boy on top of him. They cuddle, and Jimin buries his nose into Taehyung's shirt.

"I'm so happy," he says.

"Me too. I love you," Taehyung whispers, running his fingers through Jimin's hair and kissing his forehead. The thumb of his other hand glides across his cheek, brushing against the soft skin.

"I have to change the sheets again," Jimin groans. Taehyung laughs.

The rest of the day is nice, something a normal couple would do. They swap out the sheets and Jimin has to run around to find out what the laundry situation is. Jimin opens the windows because he's terrified of his roommate coming in and noticing that the space smells like sex. They shower together after Jimin deep cleans the bathroom, and they cuddle and nap and talk and watch movies, huddled together on Jimin's little single bed. The other boy breathes easier once it becomes late enough that they don't have to worry about his roommate moving in the same day.

They eventually settle in for the night, cuddled so close they're breathing the same air. Jimin's facing him, his arms wrapped around Taehyung's back.

“You’ve grown up,” Taehyung says aloud, looking at Jimin’s face once the other boy falls asleep. It’s more chiselled now, his cheekbones and jaw. He’s lost the puppy fat. Taehyung always had sharply angular features, even as a child, and Jimin’s softer face was always something that drew him in. He’s still alarmingly pretty, and Taehyung presses his nose to his soft hair to breathe in the smell of his shampoo.

Jimin’s going to start class in a few days. Maybe he’ll make friends and find his own set of people.

Taehyung can hear laughter through the open window. It looks out into a cobblestone path flanked by lush green trees, lots of breeze in the air. There are lots of family members and students chatting, excited for their new beginnings.

He thinks about how all Jimin has is him. There’s no father to inquire about services and emergency protocols, no mother to worry about whether he’s eaten dinner yet. He knows that Jimin’s parents work jobs that are tough to get days off from, and it wouldn’t have seemed necessary to accompany him considering how independent their children already are. Yoongi’s busier than ever too, hours away and ambitiously taking on several things at once like the overachieving fuck he is. He did call in the evening though, and Jimin had stepped out to answer it.

But it doesn’t change the truth, these excuses.

Taehyung is the person who showed up for Jimin. Just him. Doesn’t that make Jimin his, just as the other students belong to their families who accompanied them? His responsibility, his property.

Like this, it’s easy to forget about all the things he’s done, all the things Jimin doesn’t know about. Right now, it’s just the two of them. Taehyung’s here. Isn’t that all that matters?

He curls his arms around Jimin’s sleeping frame, the word *mine* echoing through his brain over and over until it’s smothered over by sleep.

-

Jimin's first day of college goes fantastically well. He texts Taehyung throughout about every little thing.

Minnie: Everyone here is so nice!!! (ノ◕ヮ◕)ノ*:･ﾟ✧

Minnie: The campus is so beautiful :(

Minnie: I made a friend, her name is Hyora

Minnie: I love all my classes!!!!!!!!!

Minnie: I'm going out for tteokbokki with my new friends after class today!!!!!!!!!!!!

Minnie: One of the professors asked a tough question in the introductory class and I was the only one who knew the answer!! I was so shy that I almost didn't raise my hand but I'm glad I did because he commended me!!!!!!!!! I'm so happy~

"Are you seriously on your phone right now?" A voice pipes up.

Taehyung clicks his tongue in irritation, looking at the girl kneeling between his legs. She's got a hand wrapped around his cock, and seems offended that he's texting someone while she's going down on him. A girl from his anatomy class.

"Yeah," he responds nonchalantly, going back to scrolling through Jimin's new messages.

She lets out an indignant and disbelieving gasp.

"You know, everyone I've been with says I'm really good at this."

"If you were good at this, you'd be talking less," Taehyung counters flatly, heart reacting to some of Jimin's texts.

"You're an asshole."

Taehyung looks away from his phone then, icy eyes fixing on her. She almost seems a little afraid then, her own eyes widening slightly when they make contact.

“Like that matters to you. You’re just here to suck my cock.”

“I-”

“You’re boring me. You can either do what you came here to or leave. I’m not the one who was begging for this,” Taehyung says casually, responding to Jimin’s messages.

Me: Why don’t you stay the night with me?

Me: We can order in and watch movies. Maybe go out?

Me: No curfew when you’re with me

Minnie: Are you my local guardian? ㅋㅋㅋ

Minnie: And yes!!!!!!!! I’m so excited

Taehyung smiles just as his cock is enveloped once more by a wet yet barely satisfactory heat. He leans back against the cushions of his sofa, spreading his legs.

Minnie: I’m so happy here, Tae

Minnie: I’m so happy to be with you

Minnie: I’m so thankful. I feel like I’m dreaming (/▽＼*)。o○♡

Minnie: My happy days are finally starting eeeeeeeeeeeeeee

Minnie: Everything feels perfect. I don’t want to jinx it but I can’t help but acknowledge it and be grateful to god and fate and everything :((

Minnie: Is this what growing up feels like

Taehyung smiles, somehow in the mood to tease him.

Me: I'm not your local guardian, I'm your daddy

Minnie: Whaaaat? :o Like my Appa?
Minnie: Tae what are you saying you're making me laugh in class ㅋㅋㅋ

Me: you don't understand what I mean?

Minnie: You're my boyfriend not my Appa

Taehyung smirks, letting out a breathy amused exhale. So typical. The girl who's sucking him off seems to think she's doing a good job so she speeds up, her head bobbing in between his legs, not able to take him all the way. Not like Jimin can. She no longer seems bothered about the fact that he's very evidently got his full attention on his phone.

Me: I'll show you what I mean some time

Me: About me being your daddy

Minnie: you're not my daddy 。　゜　゜(´O`)　゜　゜。

Minnie: quit teasing me

Me: But you're my little baby, aren't you?

Minnie: I am (`ε´)

Me: I don't have to be your father to be your daddy

Minnie: I'm getting flustered so I'm going to put away my phone

Minnie: I need to focus

Me: Good boy

He couldn't resist it.

Minnie: :O

Taehyung smiles before locking his phone and flinging it to the side, sinking his fingers into the girl's hair and fucking her throat without a single care in the world.

Life's perfect, isn't it?

-

Taehyung's been waiting outside Jimin's university gates for ages now.

They'd made plans to grab lunch and go to some pottery workshop Jimin saw online, then go home and end the day with yet another sleepover. Just like Taehyung when he'd just joined university, Jimin too seems to be unravelling with all the freedom. Although his 'unravelling' mostly consists of making the most of getting to meet or see Taehyung as much and as often as he wishes to, and to be able to things like *sleep over* without so much as a single thought.

Taehyung notices all the students staring at his car as they exit through the gates. He'd worry about being recognized but he knows his windows are heavily tinted, for this exact purpose. He's still impatient. Jimin's classes were scheduled to end 30 minutes ago, and he knows he doesn't have any of his club activities today. Jimin's signed up to 4 different clubs, but

Taehyung doesn't remember which ones. One of them was jewellery making. That's as far as he can recollect. Where is he, and why is he so late?

Taehyung switches off his engine and sighs, leaning back against the headrest of the driver's seat.

He's about to call Jimin when he finally sees him.

Jimin is embroiled in a big group of students. Taehyung straightens up, squinting at the scene. It looks like a loose circle of students who seem to be talking about something exciting. Many of the girls giggle, the boys sport cheeky grins, and Jimin's got a shy yet excited smile on his plump lips, puppy-like eyes sparkling and little hands balled into fists.

Taehyung watches for a few minutes, eyebrows narrowing. He decides he's had enough when he sees one of the boys nudge Jimin and say something to him, his words making Jimin smile wider. Taehyung's not used to this - seeing Jimin with friends, least of all other boys. He'd taken it upon himself to get rid of any potential friends Jimin could have had in high school. Perhaps he's going to have to be more involved here…

Taehyung blares the horn of his car, loud enough that everyone in a short radius around the vehice nearly jumps out of their skin. Jimin included, who startles and presses a hand to his chest in shock. He looks around, eventually spotting Taehyung's car and recognizing it immediately.

Taehyung presses down onto the horn once more.

He watches as Jimin apologetically excuses himself from the group and skips over to his car. Like an obedient little puppy. Taehyung's chest swells with pride as he watches Jimin hurry his way over to him.

Jimin opens the car door and slides inside, flashing Taehyung an excited smile. One he doesn't return.

“Hi!!” Jimin greets.

Taehyung stares back, face blank.

Jimin’s smile fades.

“I’m sorry I’m late. The seniors kept us all back to talk about the orientation party they’re throwing for our batch tonight. I’m so excited!”

“A party?” Taehyung asks, raising an eyebrow.

“So you *can* speak,” Jimin giggles.

“What party?” Taehyung asks, frowning.

“I’m not going to tell you,” Jimin pouts. “You haven’t even said hello to me. Or given me a kiss.”

“We’ll see about that later, if you’re good,” Taehyung responds, putting his car and gear and driving away. He keeps his eyes on the road but his mind is all on the conversation they’re having, and the incessant need to get answers to his questions. “Tell me about this party of yours.”

Jimin sighs.

“It’s an orientation dinner.”

“Didn’t you already have an orientation dinner? On your first day?”

“This one is more informal, with the rest of the seniors from some other departments too. It’s just dinner and drinks at a popular bar nearby. Casual and fun. And there’ll be games for everyone to get to know each other-”

Taehyung laughs bitterly.

“Get to know each other?” He mocks. “You mean an easy way for seniors to find stupid naive freshmen to stick their dicks into.”

Jimin flinches.

“Why are you talking like that?” He asks, voice thin.

“They’re planning to get you drunk. Loose enough that it’ll be as good as you asking for it. Next thing you know, you’re dazed out of your mind and unable to comprehend the fact that you’re being dragged to a DVD room or to someone’s pig sty of a studio,” Taehyung narrates plainly, eyes flicking to Jimin, taking in his aghast expression. “And when you wake up the next morning all sore and sloppy and ruined, it’ll be too late. They’ll all know you as the easy freshman who isn’t good for anything but a fuck.”

Taehyung knows, because he’s attended a million fresher parties just like this one. He’s slept with seniors during his and has also been the one to sleep with the new juniors too when it became his turn to host parties like these. It’s exactly how it works. Or rather, it’s exactly how he does them.

SNU could be different. Their low acceptance rate means they have a higher chance of actually having students with some moral character. But still, Taehyung’s going to have his way.

“That sounds like rape,” Jimin says.

“Call it what you want. It’s still the truth.”

“It won’t be like that-” Jimin starts. “They’re all really nice. And they’re probably not even into guys-”

I wasn’t into guys either. You’re not just a guy. You’re something else that has ruined me. You’re prettier than any other girl on this fucking planet, and everyone knows it. No one can touch you but me.

“You’re not going to that party, Jimin,” Taehyung answers, feeling even more sure as he looks at Jimin’s features, once again confronted by how beautiful he is. There’s no way other people aren’t seeing what he’s seeing. “No parties.”

“What?” Jimin demands. “What do you mean, *no parties*?”

“I mean, no parties,” Taehyung repeats simply, pulling to a stop at a signal and turning to face him. “If you want to go to barbecue restaurants and pubs and karaoke rooms that badly, I’ll take you. You can do all of those things with me. But you’re not going to any parties. Especially ones with other men there. I won’t allow it. Just class, university club sessions and maybe meeting female friends during the day. That’s it. Once the sun sets, you’ll either be in your dorm room or at home with me.”

Jimin’s eyes are wide, and he appears in disbelief of the words coming out of his mouth.

“You can’t be serious,” he says. “You’re kidding, right?”

“I’m just protecting you,” Taehyung shrugs.

“I already told them I’ll go. What do I-” Jimin splutters.

“It’s not up for debate, babe,” Taehyung cuts him off. “No parties. I mean it.”

“What if I don’t drink? Tae, I just-”

“Doesn’t matter.”

“Tae, I’m not twelve. Just trust me-”

Taehyung whips his head towards him, his next words coming out scathingly.

“You’re not going, Jimin. I’ve already decided. You’re coming home with me today.”

Taehyung looks at him as he says it, taking in Jimin’s ruddy red and frustrated face. He almost dares him to say it, to say *who the hell are you to tell me what to do*, or, *you’re my boyfriend not my owner*. But it never comes.

Jimin’s silent for the rest of the day, looking away from him with eyes stinging with unshed tears.

-

Jimin fits seamlessly into his routine.

He’s often busy with his classes and the heaps of homework he usually has, plus the additional courses he takes 2 days a week. Jimin got a part time job at a small fashion boutique to help pay his bills. Taehyung meets him several times a week, usually at his apartment because Jimin’s roommate is a staunch Christian who wouldn’t take kindly to affection between two men. Or any kind of affection for that matter. Taehyung suggested having sex in front of him for fun, and Jimin reacted with wide eyes and hands waving around to quickly reject the idea. Jimin’s happy, and he’s paranoid about anything making the bubble burst.

Taehyung's confident. He's got a security system in his building, so Jimin can't enter unless he buzzes him up. It eliminates the worry of him walking in on something Taehyung doesn't want him to.

Perfect perfect perfect. Down to a tee. No Yoongi, no rules, no distractions.

Well, some distractions. Like Jimin's thriving friend circle. He even came out as gay to some of them, he'd excitedly told Taehyung one night. They didn't mind at all. It's a whole new realm for Jimin, who has spent his whole life being shunned just for being unapologetically different. Jimin raves about them all day, a colourful group of boys and girls, and Taehyung can't recall a single name.

Taehyung appeases himself by constantly asking Jimin who matters to him the most.

And the answer is the same as it's always been.

"You," Jimin says against his lips, fingers tangled into Taehyung's hair.

"Mmm," Taehyung murmurs, happy with the response. He runs his hands up Jimin's sides, underneath his clothes. He's been dressing a little more boldly, openly wearing dainty blouses and pretty berets and cute jewellery now that there's no uniform. No one to make fun of him either. People either support him, or just don't care.

Slowly but surely, Jimin is coming out of his cocoon. He's blooming into a beautiful butterfly.

It's a warm evening after class, Taehyung's apartment bathed in indigo with speckles of city lights reflected in the shiny marble wall. Jimin's underneath him, and they're making out to a slow song that's playing on his speaker system. It's just the two of them in this little world, legs tangled and sheets caught between their moving bodies.

Taehyung cups Jimin's cheeks, staring into his starry eyes. His hands are big enough that one could cover his entire face, engulfing it in his warm hold.

"What?" Jimin asks, shy. His lips are slick with spit, red and bitten raw.

How can you be so smart yet so stupid?

Taehyung's fingers cradle his skull, and he imagines the feeling of Jimin's little brain in his grasp. *What's in here?* They're studying all about brains and synapses and links. He imagines a large framed photograph of himself, hung up in a burnished gold frame, a grandiose presence. He's always on Jimin's mind after all. Maybe there'd be more mundane things, typical Jimin things like his subtle lip glosses and stationery and stuffies and sticky sweets. Small interests that don't take away from the time Jimin spends admiring him.

That's all there should be room for.

"Nothing," Taehyung says around a light yet heavy exhale, dipping down to kiss him once more.

-

"Should I get jajangmyeon for dinner?" Taehyung asks absentmindedly, laying in bed.

Daeun snorts, running a hand through her short hair. She's sitting on the edge of the mattress, smoking a cigarette. All she's got on is her sports bra.

"Sure," she says. "I'll be leaving in a few minutes."

"Cool, I'm gonna take a shower," Taehyung responds, pulling himself out of bed and trudging to the bathroom. He flings off his sweats and steps into the shower chamber, turning on the hot water and going through the motions of getting clean.

He can hear Daeun shuffling around outside, probably gathering her stuff and preparing to head out.

And then he hears his front door beeping, the sound it makes when someone is keying in the code from outside. Taehyung furrows his eyebrows, rubbing his shampoo into his scalp.

His maid already came this morning. Did she forget something?

The door opens. Taehyung listens.

“Tae?” Jimin’s muffled voice rings out through the bathroom door.

“Fuck,” Taehyung spits, furiously scrubbing his shampoo off. His heart is hammering in his chest, jaw clenched as he races to get out of the shower as fast as possible.

“Oh, hi! Who are you?” He hears Jimin say, who probably must’ve seen Daeun.

“Hey, I’m Daeun. I’m Tae’s friend.”

Taehyung turns off the water, rushing to wrap his towel around himself. He opens the door just as Jimin speaks.

“Oh, it’s so lovely to meet you! I’m Taehyung’s boyfriend, Jimin.”

It’s almost comical, Daeun’s face. It’s still blank and impassive for the most part, but he sees the way her breathing pauses and her eyes widen just a smidge. Jimin’s beaming, genuinely overjoyed to meet one of Taehyung’s friends. The amount of trust he has in Taehyung is laughable.

The moment Jimin sees him, he skips over to him. Taehyung swoops down to peck him and wraps a wet arm around his slim waist. “Hey, baby. This is a surprise.”

Taehyung looks at Daeun once Jimin’s head is hooked over his shoulder when they’re hugging, giving her a look that’s a warning to shut up and play along. Her mouth is dropped open, and she’s frozen in place. She’s staring at him like he’s grown two more heads.

“This is Daeun. She was here for a pair project we’re working on together.”

Jimin nods, pulling away from the hug and smiling at her.

“Oh! I’m sorry, I hope I didn’t disturb you,” he says then, seeming embarrassed.

“Of c-course not, we were done,” Daeun says.

“Yeah, that’s why I was taking a shower too. Daeun was gathering the books and stuff.”

“I see. I thought I’d surprise you,” Jimin reveals with a timid smile, now looking at Taehyung. “My afternoon classes got cancelled and I have work off today. I was about to call you and tell you to buzz me up but someone let me in. And I saw you key in your code last week and I remembered it…”

“I love it,” Taehyung states, and he hopes his smile is convincing because inside, he’s a mess. He’s pretty sure he’s sweating, never been caught so off guard before. He didn’t know he’d be this afraid at the thought of Jimin catching him cheating. He didn’t know it would affect him this much.

It must seem natural to Jimin, because the other boy snuggles into his side. He then looks at Daeun, seeming a little shy.

“Did you say your name was Daeun?...”

“Yeah.”

“Choi Daeun?”

Wow. Taehyung didn’t even know that was her last name. Still, he gulps, wondering what Jimin’s onto.

“That’s me,” Daeun responds with a watery smile. She keeps looking at Taehyung, and he knows they’re going to have a conversation about this later.

“O-Oh, I follow you on Instagram…I thought you looked familiar. I’m part of the art club in my university and the chairman showed us your account. I love your work, I really admire you…” Jimin reveals bashfully, shifting on his feet.

This, Taehyung wasn’t expecting. Jimin *knows* Daeun?

Daeun’s cheeks turn pink. She does have quite a few followers, nearly 50,000. It’s all funky graphic collages with the odd painting or sculpture.

“Oh wow, thank you so much,” she says graciously, and it’s genuine. “I don’t think I’m that great…”

“You are! You’re amazing, I wish I could create art like you do. I just do some doodling as a hobby, and some painting.”

Taehyung didn’t know that. He had no idea that Jimin even liked art.

“I’m sure your work is wonderful,” Daeun replies, and she seems endeared by Jimin. “Actually, I do teach a few preliminary classes over the weekend. You’re welcome to join.”

Taehyung glares at her, jaw clenching. What the fuck is she doing?

“Oh wow, really? I’d love to! How do I sign up?”

“I can text you the details.”

They exchange numbers then, and whenever Jimin looks at Taehyung with an excited disbelieving smile, he’s forced to return it. Who knew Jimin idolized the girl Taehyung’s cheating on him with?

“I have to head out, so I’ll see you guys later,” Daeun says then, picking up her bag. Jimin nods fervently, walking her to the door.

The moment Daeun’s gone, Jimin seems beside himself with happiness. He raves about how he likes all of Daeun’s posts, and that they should attend her class together. Taehyung declines the offer, trying his hardest not to snap and scare Jimin into never contacting her.

“I need to shower.” Jimin pouts. “You already took one without me.”

“I didn’t know you were coming, babe.”

“Wanna take one again with me?”

“I can’t, baby. I have something to submit now anyway. You go. I bought that shower gel you’d wanted too.”

Jimin beams, and a few minutes later, Taehyung can hear him hum happily along with the song he's playing on his phone as he bathes.

Taehyung rushes to his balcony after pulling on some clothes, shutting the door behind him and yanking out his phone. He calls Daeun, seething, and she picks up after a few rings.

"Hello?"

"You're a fucking bitch, you know that?" Taehyung spits.

"Excuse me?"

"What the fuck was that, huh? Taking his number? Are you trying to threaten me or something?"

"I don't know, Taehyung. How about you start off by admitting that you're a fucking hypocrite who looks down on anyone who's in a relationship, and is simultaneously dating who seems to be the sweetest boy I've ever met. Does he know what a piece of shit you are?"

"If you breathe a word, you can say goodbye to Namjoon. I'll tell him everything."

A few beats of silence.

"If he wants to learn art, I'm not going to let whatever this is between us come in the middle of that. I don't think I did anything wrong. And I wasn't planning to tell him to begin with. I thought we had an understanding."

"You're not better than me. You're doing the same thing I am."

“I never said I was, Taehyung. And I thought you were straight.”

“I am straight.”

“Huh. Alright, fine. How long have you been together?”

“Nearly 3 years,” He admits.

Daeun inhales sharply. *“Then why’d you act like you didn’t know what it was like to cheat? Like it didn’t matter to you?”*

“Because it doesn’t matter to me. I don’t see it the way you do.”

“You don’t feel bad?”

“I don’t. Never did, never will.”

“Wow,” Daeun laughs, and it’s bitter. *“You really are an asshole.”*

“You think you calling me that is going to hurt me? I don’t care.”

“It’s just a fact.”

“Don’t pull any funny shit with Jimin. I’m being serious.”

“You love him?”

Taehyung pauses. These are the same questions he keeps pestering her with, and now it’s flipped back onto him. Deep down, he knows the answer to the question, but he refuses to dwell on it longer for it to surface.

“I hit a nerve, didn’t I?”

“Fuck off,” Taehyung spits, ending the call. He takes his time to cool down on the balcony, knowing he has limited time before Jimin’s done with his shower. The breeze helps, and he focuses on all the traffic and people walking around.

By the time the bathroom door opens and Jimin’s walking out, face flushed with hot steam and hair wet, Taehyung’s all smiles.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the sixth chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 7: Momentary Bliss

Chapter Notes

Here's the seventh chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

PLEASE REREAD THE TAGS AND WARNINGS + PROLOGUE NOTES!!!!!!!!!
THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE FOR THIS CHAPTER!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

Beautiful moodboard made by Ina (cappuccinokyu) <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The water’s cold today.

Something about the heating function in their university pool not working. Taehyung, being a second year student, is too young to be swim captain like he was back in highschool. That position is occupied by a senior. He’s still a formidable member of their team though, despite the intense practice they always have. His muscles burn against the icy water, swimming in consecutive laps.

It’s been great for his physique, and truly, he should be thankful to be able to swim in such a great pool with so many instructors and coaches. His stamina and strength have been at their highest.

Taekwondo’s sort of taken a backseat, these days. He still practices a few times a month, but it’s nowhere as rigorous as his regime before. Back when he actually felt the inclination to be good at it, if only to be better than Yoongi.

Yoongi, who somehow finds the time to call Jimin every day. After his early morning shift at a grocery store and his long classes. Plus the internship he has 4 days a week. They’re both so hardworking, and still remain close despite not living under the same roof anymore.

Taehyung hears a muffled voice from above the water. He rushes to finish the lap, bracing his arms by the edge of the pool as he looks up. It’s Haneul, the team captain.

“You heard me,” the other man says, seeming surprised.

“I have good hearing,” Taehyung responds, shrugging. “What’s up, hyung?”

“You’ve been working real hard. What is this, your 50th lap?”

“I stopped counting, honestly.”

Haneul chuckles.

“We’ve got more of a budget because of you. Your win at Sungkyunkwan was pretty big.”

“I’m glad. Does that mean we can fix this busted heater? Water’s freezing,” Taehyung laughs.

“Oh, we’ll get that fixed. I’ve actually been meaning to talk to you about something.”

“What’s up?” Taehyung asks, now hauling himself out of the pool and sitting on the ledge. It’s early evening now, he can tell from the darkening of the sky he can see through the windows.

“There’s a match at SNU coming up. In a while, a few months from now.”

Taehyung’s posture perks up. SNU? He nods for Haneul to continue.

“It’s a big one. We’ve somehow never been able to surpass them in scoring. They’ve got way bigger budgets and better trainers. We’re not doing too shabby ourselves, but it’s kinda always been hard to match up to what they’re working with. Does that make sense?”

“Yeah, it does,” Taehyung responds, wondering where this is going.

“I really want us to win this year. And the thing is, I think we can do it. I know we can. We’ve been doing way better in collegiate-level matches this year than we’ve ever before,

and a bulk of that is thanks to you. I know sports was part of your portfolio when you applied, and pardon the cliche, but I genuinely feel like you've blown us all out of the water."

Taehyung chuckles, his ego swelling. He knows he's good. It's always nice to be reminded.

"The thing is that I'm actually retiring from competitive swimming next month. Or I've been told to, rather," the other man says with a smidge of sadness in his eyes, surprising Taehyung. "My performance has been declining. Got looked at by a doc and turns out I've worn my muscles down. If I keep going it might cause permanent damage, especially since I've kept swimming for years with injuries that never healed. Guess coach was wrong, right? There is such a thing as too much time in the pool. And I think it's time for me to leave too. But I'll never lose my love for the sport and this team, which is why I want to make sure it's left in good hands."

Taehyung's eyes light up.

"I want you to replace me as captain once I retire."

He feels an elated warmth spreading down to his fingertips. Haneul continues speaking.

"We've got more people in the team who are senior to you, but I genuinely feel like you'd be the best fit. Coach agrees. If it's something you think you'd like, we can take this to the board. I know how busy pre-med is, so I understand if your schedule's too full-"

"I'd love it," Taehyung responds immediately. It would mean more responsibilities. But it would give him control. His team members have been nothing but kind and doting towards him, but he would be lying if he said he wasn't curious about how they'd react knowing that someone younger is leading them. It would also be better in terms of sport for him in general. He's taken part in a few national level meets, and they've always gone well. This should add to it.

"Great," Haneul says, seeming relieved.

They make small talk until it's time for them both to leave, and Taehyung showers and changes with a smile on his face.

He drives all the way to the SNU dorms and picks Jimin up. They buy some tteokbokki and ice cream and head up to a nice landing where they have a beautiful view of the sprawling cityscape. They eat, and make out to whatever's playing on the radio. After that, Taehyung drives them both to his place where Jimin stays the night, only after making Taehyung promise to drop him to class the next morning.

Jimin is diligent, and doesn't slack off. Taehyung's seen the meticulous binders of study material he's already accumulated and organized this early into the school year. He's the type of student that writes his notes in different coloured pens with beautiful handwriting, decorating the margins and headings and using transparent post-its.

"Who are you texting?" Taehyung asks sleepily, roused in the middle of the night to find Jimin curled up with his back facing him, fiddling around with his phone. He'd only just managed to fall asleep, a rarity. The light of the screen creates a halo around his silhouette, bright against Taehyung's tired eyes. His muscles hurt. Maybe he practised too much today.

"Nothing, just some class work. Go back to sleep, baby," Jimin responds quietly, throwing a hand back blindly till he finds Taehyung's and squeezes it.

For some reason, Jimin's dismissal wakes him up fully, something razor-sharp and stout with panic rising up his chest.

Taehyung doesn't hesitate in darting forward and snatching Jimin's phone out of his hands.

"Hey!" Jimin whines, startled. "I was in the middle of typing something-"

Taehyung's eyebrows are furrowed as he desperately takes in Jimin's messages.

It really is just a chatroom for a group project. They're all discussing when they'd be free to meet and split up the work. He then goes back to see all of Jimin's messages, who he's texting. He distantly realizes that Jimin's wallpaper and chat background are a mirror selfie Taehyung sent him of him in his scrubs.

"If you're texting some other guy, I'll kill you," Taehyung says quietly and worryingly seriously, opening up all the chats one by one and reading the conversations. He skips over the ones between Jimin and his family, instead focusing on the unknown numbers and unfamiliar names.

"Tae, give it back," Jimin complains, pushing at his arm.

"I'm being serious. You better not be talking to anyone else," Taehyung says, suddenly very unsettled at the mere thought.

"You're so possessive," Jimin sighs, reaching out and starting to pry Taehyung's fingers off his phone with his little ones. Taehyung resists the urge to grab his wrist and twist it till there's a crack. He doesn't know why.

"Why are you so paranoid? Don't you trust me?" Jimin asks.

Taehyung yanks Jimin's phone back once more, determined to go through every single chat till he's seen them all. There are a lot of mentors, a few professors, some classmates. He skips over the female contacts, knowing he doesn't have to worry about them.

And then he sees Daeun's name. He scrutinizes every single message. They seem like they're friends, Daeun asking Jimin how he enjoyed her class 3 weeks ago, and Jimin sending her his drawings. From the messages, it seems like he looks up to her and values her opinions, and she's very sweet to him in a way that's genuine. They talk quite often, mostly Jimin initiating the conversation, and Taehyung knows that he cannot react to avoid raising suspicion.

And when he's finally done, and has verified that Jimin is still his sweet boyfriend and not a lying cheating whore, he relaxes.

He gives Jimin his phone back. The other boy scoffs.

“Now, it’s only fair if I check yours too,” Jimin quips, frowning.

Taehyung freezes, knowing there’s enough evidence on there to match up with a crime scene. He looks at Jimin, eyes trained on his irritated face.

“I don’t think it’s *fair*, Jimin. I’m not the one texting other people in the middle of the night.”

“It was for school, I-”

“We’re not the same. You know I’d never cheat.”

Jimin’s mouth drops open before it clamps shut, and his face hardens. He sits up, then gets onto his feet and disappears out of the bedroom.

“Where the fuck are you going?”

There’s no response.

Taehyung shoots off the bed too, walking into the living room to see Jimin picking up his night bag that he’d left on the sofa.

“Where are you going?” He repeats. “Come back to bed.”

“I’m going back to my dorm.”

“No, you’re not.”

“I don’t want to be around you right now.”

Taehyung’s blood boils.

“What do you mean by that?” He asks, voice steely cold.

“You just insinuated that I’d cheat,” Jimin says exasperatedly, throwing his hands up. “I can’t think of a single thing I’ve done that could lead to you feeling that way about me.”

“It’s just something I’m concerned about.”

“Why?” Jimin demands, seeming bewildered.

“I don’t know. How’d you react if you saw me sneakily texting someone in the middle of the night?”

“I was being sneaky because you were sleeping and I didn’t want to disturb you! You already have trouble sleeping as it is!”

“Either way, it’s just something I’m worried about. Weren’t you worried too, when I was here first without you? You always thought I’d leave you for someone else.”

“You know I would never-”

“Can you really blame me, Jimin? You’re always out with these ‘friends’ of yours. I don’t know them, and I don’t trust them,” Taehyung spits, raising his voice.

“I asked you if you wanted to meet them, and you said no,” Jimin responds shortly.

“You know how I feel about dating publicly. I didn’t say anything when you told Daeun, but…”

“I thought we could tell people since we aren’t in school anymore.”

“No.”

Jimin inhales shakily then, bringing his hands up and digging them into his eyes.

“Is it always going to be like this?” He asks, timid and afraid. “Are we always going to be a secret?”

“I-”

“A-Are you ashamed of me?”

“Of course not,” Taehyung responds, instinctual and rushed. He darts over to Jimin, pulling him into his arms. “I love you.”

He whispers it over and over into Jimin’s ear, rubbing his back when he starts to cry.

“I’m not ashamed of you,” Taehyung adds after a while. “I’m just not ready to come out as someone who’s in a relationship with another guy.”

He’s not going to say gay. Or even bisexual, or fluid. Because he’s not. He doesn’t even watch gay porn. It’s off-putting to him. But there’s nothing about what they’re doing that feels anything but right.

The excuse seems to appease the other boy, who sags slightly against him. Jimin hugs him back, burying his nose into his t-shirt.

“Don’t worry, okay?” Jimin sniffles. “I know how hard it is to come out. I still wonder how I had the courage to do it back then. I won’t force you…I’m sorry for pressurizing you. I’m sorry for telling Daeun.”

“It’s okay, my love.”

“And I’m s-sorry for making you worry, or feel anxious. I guess it’s just because I’ve never had friends before. It feels so nice. I’ll text you more and be more transparent, I promise. I’d never ever cheat on you. I’m so in love with you that it’s hard for me to imagine that I could ever not be…”

They stay there for a little while, hugging in Taehyung’s living room, moonlight streaming in through the windows. Jimin eventually pulls away.

“Let’s go back to sleep?” He asks, playing with Taehyung’s long fingers.

Taehyung smiles, swooping him up into his arms and carrying him to bed.

-

Taehyung starts to spend more time with Hyungsoo.

The other boy's always pressing him to meet, complaining about how Taehyung never makes the time, so they've met up at a club. While Taehyung's maintained his popular lifestyle and charisma, a lot of his old friends have lost it, fading into the background at whatever universities they go to. No longer somebody popular, but a faceless student that melts into the crowd, yet another mundane presence.

Hyungsoo has a girlfriend now, someone who he told Taehyung he really liked. It's a girl who works as a barista in the cafe down the road from his family restaurant.

But as Taehyung watches him make out with a random girl on the dance floor, his hands inching up underneath her top, he thinks about the fact that maybe he's not the demon everyone makes him out to be. There are tons of people like him. All horribly selfish with egos as tall as the sky. Who believe that everyone else are pawns to be moved around for their own satisfaction, props in a play that only they write.

Jimin will always be Taehyung's romantic interest, in the little drunken play he conjures up while downing his glass of neat whiskey. There will be side characters, extras, scenes where Taehyung will sway, but the warm lighting and soft orchestra will only be reserved for Jimin. Jimin Jimin Jimin. Jimin with his soft eyes and gentle voice and pretty face and tight little hole that's always there for Taehyung to fuck. Would the audience applaud them?

The introspective train of thought occupies his alcohol-riddled mind, even as there's a girl trying to insert herself into his lap. He lets her kiss him, going along with it lazily. The lines of her body are all wrong. Her lips aren't plush like Jimin's, and her ass is too flat. She's got a narrow waist but her chest is obviously not natural. Taehyung pushes her off, standing up on shaky legs and walking away.

Even though the two of them arrived together, Hyungsoo and him part ways midway into the night. Taehyung to his own house after he somehow realizes that he's not in the mood to fuck someone who isn't Jimin in that moment, and Hyungsoo who goes to the random girl's house in what is obviously and evidently not his first time cheating.

Me: I love you babe

Me: You make my world go round and round

Minnie: Omg!!!! σ(≧ε≦σ) ♡ you're so cute Tae

Minnie: I love you too!!!

Taehyung smiles, genuine and lazy, then promptly falls asleep on his couch.

-

"Are you wearing makeup?" Taehyung asks Jimin, laying on top of him. He'd come here straight from class, and he's still wearing his scrubs because Jimin says he looks handsome in them. They're cuddling in his dorm room since his roommate has returned to his hometown for a family emergency. Jimin's got a peachy pink glittery tint on his eyelids, and his lips are shiny, a warm tone of blush.

"Hmm? I always wear a little makeup."

"No no, I know," Taehyung clarifies. "But your eyes look different. And your lips too. Don't you usually just wear gloss?"

"O-Oh," Jimin says, seeming shy. "My friends and I went to a beauty sale last week. I've noticed a lot of people in my art class, even other boys, wearing makeup. So I bought some lip tints and eye shadow. Does it look nice? Do you like it?"

"It does look nice," Taehyung admits. "But you look like a girl."

Jimin frowns then.

"My friends say that anyone can wear makeup."

“Never said it was a bad thing, babe,” Taehyung responds casually, stretching up. “It’s just different. You look hot. It’s nice to try this stuff at home.”

“But I should be able to do traditionally feminine things without being called a girl. I think that’s unfair. And it’s not just home, I’ve been going to class like this over the past few days too.”

Taehyung frowns at him, sitting up. It’s late afternoon, and they’re piled onto Jimin’s little single bed as they usually are. SNU’s dorm is as quiet and serene as it always is. There’s not that much chatter anymore, them being halfway into the school year with their rigorous academics.

His eyes catch a few frilly pink tops on Jimin’s clothing rack, and some feminine cardigans. It only sets him off further.

“I don’t want you going out like this in public. I won’t allow it. I think you’re spending too much time with this art crowd.”

Daeun, mostly. This has to be her doing, her influence.

“Daeun says-”

“You shouldn’t talk to her. She’s not trustworthy, and she’s a bad influence on you,” Taehyung interjects. Every time he gets a glimpse of the two interacting, it ruins his day. They’re friends, and Daeun has kept her word about not revealing the truth. But it still puts him on edge, because he feels like Daeun could ruin everything if she wanted to. It seems that the girl genuinely likes Jimin.

“How is she a bad influence? There’s nothing wrong with embracing who I am. I’ve always wanted to put on makeup but I was scared that I’d be bullied, and now I finally can-”

Taehyung reaches up and grabs his face, squeezing Jimin’s cheeks together roughly, cutting

him off. He yanks his face closer to him, grip bruising. It's so satisfying, the way the action makes Jimin's body flail over the bed, Taehyung always having the advantage of strength.

"Stop talking about this stuff. This isn't like you," he spits, tired of hearing Jimin talk about Daeun. "Saying all this crap about *embracing who you are*. It's all bullshit. There's nothing charming about being provocative. Did I say anything when you used to wear makeup in the past? Now, you're doing it for attention. You're doing this to get people to look at you, and I'm not going to tolerate it."

Jimin makes a sound in protest, and Taehyung squeezes harder. There's barely a few inches in between their faces, Taehyung's hard eyes boring into Jimin's.

"Don't," he warns, tone low. "I've heard enough. I don't want to hear you talk about this again, not another fucking word, or see you wearing this kind of makeup out in public. Or any skimpy clothes. It's just obscene, and you should know better than to disrespect yourself, and me that way. If you think I'm angry now, you don't want to see what I'll be like if you repeat any of this."

Jimin's staring up at him with wide wet owlish eyes, his body slack the way it usually gets when Taehyung scares him, the fear eating up his rebellious spirit.

"Got it?" He prods, jerking his face. "I'm not going to say this twice."

When Jimin doesn't react, Taehyung digs his fingers harder into his skin.

The other boy makes a meek sound that he takes as an affirmative. Taehyung releases his face, and Jimin immediately sinks into the bed and turns so that his back is to Taehyung. He curls in on himself, his breathing short. There are deep red lines on his face where Taehyung's fingers were.

Taehyung pretends he doesn't hear him start to cry quietly, and stands up to go to the vending machine in the corridor outside Jimin's room. He buys himself a pack of chips, and decides to buy Jimin a chocolate bar to make up for what happened.

He takes out his phone too, texting Daeun.

Me: Stop hanging out with Jimin

Me: You're ruining him. He's starting to act out and dress up like a slut

Daeun: I'm only helping him be his happiest

Daeun: Maybe if you weren't a bigot you'd see how he's so much more alive right now

Daeun: What's wrong with that?

Me: What's wrong is that your fucking loose attitude is rubbing off on him, and it's causing us to fight

Me: I swear Daeun, if you fuck up our relationship, I'll destroy you

Daeun: You should think about why him making friends and being bolder with his identity bothers you so much

Me: Consider this my final warning

When he returns, Jimin's supposedly asleep even though he's extremely still on the bed. The makeup is washed off, not a trace of it to be found.

-

Taehyung's match at SNU swings around.

He worked hard for it. Practiced day and night, swimming until the smell of chlorine and the drag of water against his muscles were the only sensations that remained.

And of course, fucking Jimin.

Things between them have been strained.

Jimin still attends his match, sitting on the bleachers and cheering on. But there's been a sadness in his eyes over the past few weeks that makes everything he does seem hollow. Even now, he's wearing a flannel shirt with loose mom jeans. Conservative clothing that Taehyung won't punish him for wearing. Jimin doesn't talk about his art classes anymore, and Taehyung doesn't ask.

Taehyung swims with unwavering focus and speed, subconsciously keeping track of the positions of the swimmers from the other teams. SNU's pool really is everything like what he's heard; Olympic level with large bleachers and smooth, expensive tiling.

When he feels himself reach the end of the pool at the tail end of the final lap, he yanks himself out from under the water just as SNU's swimmer reaches too. There's a tense silence across the swimmers and audience as they wait for the big screen to read out their results.

The moment he sees his name flag up at the top, Taehyung hauls himself out of the pool. His teammates throw a towel around him as deafening cheers engulf him, and he's thrilled beyond comparison. There's the medal ceremony and the clap on his back from Haneul that somehow means more than everything else.

And then there's Jimin, clapping from where he stands in the audience, nondescript and mellow. Like he isn't the most important person here. Like *this* match wasn't so important because establishing that he's always the best in front of Jimin isn't always his first priority.

Taehyung doesn't look at him once though, pretending that they don't know each other. They'll talk only once the crowd dissipates, once Taehyung has the time to be alone with him.

That time comes only later in the evening, when Taehyung finds himself walking to Jimin's dorm. There's no text from Jimin, nothing. No calls or excited congratulatory messages. None of it.

Taehyung sees a few of his teammates strolling around the SNU campus before their bus back to KU leaves, and he ducks out of sight so they won't wonder why he's straggling around. It almost feels like he's back in high school again, when he had to care about who sees what.

He manages to get into the dorm undetected, entering the code to the building that he pried out of Jimin. He strolls upstairs, sending a text to his teammates to let them know he'll be heading home on his own.

Taehyung collides with someone in Jimin's corridor. It's a man around his height, with a solid build. But when he looks up, he's got a sweet face with wide doe eyes that reduce any intimidating quality in his persona to the ground. He's holding a cup of instant ramen and is obviously on his way to the pantry.

"Look where you're going, asshole," Taehyung spits.

"I'm so sorry," the other boy says, bowing, his bangs falling into his face as he does. Taehyung chooses to ignore him, pushing past him and continuing on his way.

He knocks on Jimin's door once he arrives. It swings open a few seconds later, revealing Jimin in his pyjamas. His face is blank, and his bare toes peek out of his pants that hang too long.

"You didn't wait around for me," Taehyung says, looking into his room and verifying that his roommate is gone.

Jimin's eyes are on the floor, yet he doesn't protest as Taehyung makes his way inside and pulls him into a hug. In fact, he melts against him, and Taehyung runs his fingers up underneath his baggy hoodie to dance along his ribs.

“I knew you would come anyway,” Jimin responds, the words muffled into his t-shirt, the thin cotton one he’d put on after his shower back in the locker rooms. Once they pull away, Jimin moves to shut the door, and Taehyung sees a blur of weird ramen boy walking by with his now full cup before the wood is pressed closed.

While Jimin has his back turned, Taehyung pulls out his phone and swiftly opens up the camera, setting it to record and propping it up on Jimin’s desk that faces his bed. It’s smooth, soundless and practised.

The moment Jimin swerves back, Taehyung hugs him.

He kisses the space underneath Jimin’s ear, capturing it between his teeth and sucking lightly. Jimin shudders, his head tipping back. He can hear his shaky breathing. It’s always so quiet here.

“You gonna congratulate me?” Taehyung asks, then kissing down his neck. “I’m still waiting.”

“C-Congrats, Tae.”

“That’s it? No *I’m so proud of you*, or *I knew you would win*? I’m a little disappointed, babe.”

“Tae, we need to talk,” Jimin says then, and he sounds serious although his voice wobbles. Taehyung pulls away, frowning at him.

“About what?”

“Let’s sit?” Jimin suggests, gesturing toward his bed. Taehyung’s still for a few seconds before he eventually nods, and they both sink into the mattress. Taehyung eyes the candy print bedspread.

“What is it?” He asks, not wanting to beat around the bush.

“I’m scared of you,” Jimin whispers.

Taehyung scoffs, rolling his eyes.

“Is this about what happened the last time I was here? Jimin, I told you, I made a mistake. It happens-”

“But it shouldn’t happen. That’s the thing, right? And before you say that I’m only saying this because of my new friends, I’ve always felt this way. You shouldn’t resort to intimidating me and using physical force to get me to listen to you. You r-really scared me, that day. I couldn’t think straight for a while after.”

Taehyung sighs, running a hand through his hair.

“Do you think I’m some big villain? Someone who enjoys losing their temper?”

“No, I-”

“I just did what I did because it was the only thing that would make you listen to me. It’s for your own good.”

“But you just said it was a mistake,” Jimin counters, voice barely higher than a whisper as he picks out the inconsistency in Taehyung’s words. “Does it not matter to you that it’s been affecting my mental health?”

“The truth isn’t always nice, Jimin. I’m sorry that I hurt you, but you wouldn’t have understood otherwise-”

“It’s obvious to me now that we are not going to agree,” Jimin interjects, tone watery. “And it’s sad because I love you so much that I don’t know what to do with myself.”

Taehyung’s silent, staring at him.

“You can’t touch me like that again. Promise me you won’t. Promise me that you won’t hurt me like that ever again. Tell me that the fact that I’m still hurting about it matters to you, even if it’s a lie.”

“Jimin-”

“Promise me. Because if you don’t, all that it means is that you don’t care about me. I don’t know if I’ll be able to survive that.”

Taehyung feels boxed in. He thinks about it. Technically, Jimin has stopped acting out. He’s stopped with the makeup and all the rambling about being more open with his identity. He’s stopped. So maybe Taehyung wouldn’t be losing much anyway. Even if it does nip at his pride.

Jimin’s staring at him, eyes wet and wide with hope.

“I promise.”

It hurts him to say it. He doesn’t feel in control, and he hates it.

Jimin closes his eyes then, seeming relieved.

“Do you mean it?”

“Yes,” Taehyung responds, pulling him into another hug. He kisses his soft nose. “You know I didn’t mean to hurt you, right?”

Jimin snuggles into his chest. “Yeah, I know.”

Taehyung strokes his fingers through Jimin’s hair, his eyes trained into the distance. His jaw is clenched, and he doesn’t know why it bothers him so much, giving into Jimin’s request. In an ideal world, what would’ve happened shouldn’t have happened. But it isn’t an ideal world, and Taehyung knows that he had to nip Jimin’s behaviour in the bud. It’s just so tempting to scare him, because it’s so easy. And it shouldn’t be a surprise, Taehyung’s temper isn’t exactly a secret. Jimin should’ve known better than to talk back.

And at the end of the day, doesn’t Jimin belong to him? Taehyung is responsible for him. He should be able to do whatever he wants, whatever he thinks is best.

When Jimin pulls away from the hug, Taehyung forces a smile.

“You still haven’t congratulated me, you know. Not properly.”

Jimin smiles then, his eyes crinkling up into soft curves that make something in Taehyung’s chest twinge. He leans up and kisses him, and Taehyung’s quick to push him down onto the bed, already feeling his cock twitch in his sweats.

“You were so handsome,” Jimin gasps in between kisses. “When you were all focused by the pool, and the way you looked as soon as you won. I’m so lucky that you’re my boyfriend…”

“Minnie’s got a crush on me, huh?” Taehyung teases. He grabs his thighs and spreads them, winding them around his own waist.

“I’ve been in love with you since forever…”

Taehyung pulls back then, looking at him.

“You know I knew, right?” He says. “The first time we saw each other back in high school. You were on your way to class and I was walking past you. Your eyes glassed over the moment we looked at each other.”

“What, you remember that?” Jimin whines. “I used to see you at hyung’s matches and I always thought you were handsome. I used to think about how if I ever had a boyfriend, I’d want him to be like you…I was so silly and embarrassing.”

Taehyung chuckles.

“I liked you the moment I first saw you too, you know. My baby. I’d never seen someone so pretty. It’s like you were made for me.”

Jimin’s face flames, and his skin grows warm under Taehyung’s greedy hold.

Taehyung stares down at him, half endeared and half hungry. A thought falls into place.

“Did you have time to think about what I texted you on your first day?”

Jimin seems surprised by the question, his features contorting into thought as he scours his memory. It seems he can’t remember.

“About me being your daddy.”

Jimin's mouth drops open in realization. He whines then, pouting.

"I don't get it. I didn't get it then either. Is it a joke? You know I'm a little slow at understanding those-"

"What do you think about you calling me daddy when I fuck you?" Taehyung prods, ghosting his fingers up Jimin's jaw, caressing his fine bones.

"But why would I? I don't-"

"It doesn't mean that I'm your father, Jimin," Taehyung clarifies, spreading Jimin's mouth open with his thumb. "It would just mean that you're acknowledging that you belong to me. That you're under my care, and are my responsibility. That you're my baby."

Some form of understanding washes over Jimin's starry eyes. And Taehyung sees the way his pupils dilate.

"You like the sound of that?" He questions.

Jimin slowly, but hesitantly nods.

"Go on, try it," Taehyung coaxes, his eyes menacing and greedy. Jimin gulps, seeming shyer than Taehyung has ever seen him before. His mouth keeps opening and closing, as if the word was caught in his throat. Eventually, he says it.

"Daddy," Jimin whispers.

They both feel the way Taehyung's cock jerks in his grey sweats, hardening rapidly. The word's like a trigger. Jimin gasps.

“Say it again. Louder this time. And look me in the eyes.”

Jimin’s eyes turn almost teary, and he does tilt his gaze up to meet Taehyung’s. He seems embarrassed and turned on, both in high yet equal measure.

“Daddy,” he says once more, and the paper thin tone of it makes him feel like he might go feral. He grinds forward, his cock that’s tenting through his pants dragging across Jimin’s thigh.

“So fucking hot,” Taehyung rasps, greedily sinking his fingers into the waistband of Jimin’s track pants, yanking them off his body. “Yeah, I’m your daddy. I’m gonna fuck you so good.”

Jimin whimpers, and Taehyung knows he’s liking it. He looks down at the way Jimin’s hoodie hangs off his body, the lower hem dipping down to his mid thighs. Like some schoolgirl in an anime. He’s always loved Jimin’s legs. His fat thighs, long elegant calves, dainty ankles and small feet with cute toes. And his baby soft skin.

Taehyung slides down the bed, spreading Jimin’s legs. He starts to suck on the sensitive skin of his inner thighs, ignoring the small bulge in Jimin’s tight lavender boxer briefs. He shucks Jimin’s hoodie up such that his chest is exposed, dusky nipples peaking once they’re hit with the cold air.

“How is everything about you so sexy?” Taehyung questions amidst the sounds of Jimin’s high and aborted breaths, the occasional whine or two ringing out into the quiet air. Taehyung eventually stops and sits up, shuffling over on his knees up Jimin’s body such that he’s straddling his chest. His clothed erection’s just a few inches away from Jimin’s mouth.

He grabs one of Jimin’s hands and squeezes it around his cock, the pleasure dizzying.

“See? This is how hard you’ve made me. How hard you always make me.”

Jimin’s eyes are glassed over, shaky breaths leaving his lips as he watches Taehyung jerk himself with his little hand.

“You gonna let daddy fuck your throat? It’s been a while, hasn’t it?”

“Y-Yes,” Jimin whimpers.

Taehyung smirks, his fingers hurriedly shoving his sweats down low enough that he can pull his cock out. It’s hard and an angry shade of red, veins pulsing. The thick length hovers a few centimetres over Jimin’s slightly open lips. It looks so big in comparison to the other boy’s face. Jimin’s looking up at him expectantly.

“Beg for it.”

Jimin’s eyes flutter closed before they open once more, and he rests his hands on Taehyung’s thighs.

“You want it or not?” Taehyung prods.

“Please, d-daddy-”

Taehyung smirks, arousal simmering swelteringly hot in his veins. He moves forward and starts to feed his cock into Jimin’s mouth, inch by inch. He isn’t fully in when he meets the resistance of Jimin’s throat. It’s dizzying, how amazing the hot wet pressure around his dick feels, the slight suction of Jimin lips.

Taehyung groans, pulling back and thrusting into this mouth, slowly so that he doesn’t hurt his throat just yet. Jimin’s eyes are hooded and dilated, his hands still placed timidly on Taehyung’s thighs.

“So fucking good,” Taehyung praises, his head tipping back. He slowly gets Jimin reacquainted to taking more and more of his cock, his hips rolling into his face in a practised rhythm. Jimin’s gag reflex gets triggered but that makes it feel even better, the tightness of his throat contracting around him and the sight of him spluttering, fat tears slipping down his cheeks.

Taehyung keeps going, increasing his pace and eventually losing control once Jimin stops choking as much.

Before he knows it, he’s angling Jimin’s head up with firm grips on his hair, and starts fucking his throat so hard that the bedframe slams against the wall. Jimin’s soft nose pokes at his lower abdomen on every upstroke, and it feels so good that he doesn’t know what to do with himself.

“No one can take me the way you do,” Taehyung says, shaky, his breathing shallow. “You really were made for me.”

Jimin doesn’t respond, his fat lips now swollen and stretched wide around the thick girth of his cock. They’re an irritated shade of red, and look obscene. Taehyung watches the way he’s now able to sink the entire length into Jimin’s pliant mouth, plunging into his throat, arousal burning brighter when he sees Jimin’s tear-tracked cheeks and distant eyes. The sounds are filthy, wet and gurgling.

He’s so happy that all of this is getting recorded. He turns slightly, making eye contact with the camera that’s filming every delicious second.

“Fuck,” Taehyung spits, feeling like he might cum any moment. He’s never felt so turned on before. “You want daddy’s cum down your throat? Huh? Wanna choke on it?”

He punctuates the question by pulling out and slapping Jimin across the cheek with his cock, then shoving it back into his waiting mouth and continuing to thrust harshly.

Taehyung’s just about to cum when he pulls out, deciding that he’d like to fuck Jimin both ways. Jimin heaves for breath, his legs spreading automatically once Taehyung yanks off his

underwear. Drool slips down his chin in thick strands. Taehyung reaches for the bottle of lube wedged in between the mattress and the wall, popping it open and squeezing the viscous fluid onto his fingers and around Jimin's tight rim.

He preps him impatiently, wanting nothing more than to sink into his tight hole and cum. He scissors his fingers, exhaling hot and fast, sweat dripping down his temples. His skin's on fire, turned on beyond belief. His cock's still wet with Jimin's saliva, standing proud and stiff and intimidatingly big.

Jimin gasps brokenly when Taehyung pushes his cock into him after a few minutes of rushed prep, jerking up the bed when Taehyung starts to fuck him so hard he can't hold onto a single thought. He angles his hips up so that he's drilling into his prostate, smirking when Jimin squeals, his breathing now choppy.

"You liking it?" Taehyung asks, looking at Jimin's fucked out face greedily. His cheeks are sticky with tears, his lips still swollen. The other boy's head is tipped back, eyes half closed. Taehyung grabs his jaw and forces eye contact.

"Tell daddy how good he's fucking you."

"So good, 's s-so good, feel like I'm going crazy-" His voice is raspy and broken from the earlier abuse to his throat.

"That's because you like being my baby."

"Daddy-"

Jimin cums, his back bowing off the bed. Taehyung only fucks him harder, relentless against his abused prostate. His own breathing is ragged, and his muscles flex as he rails him into the bed. Jimin lets out a strangled shout, his fists curling into his sheets.

“You’re mine, you’re always going to be mine-” Taehyung grits out, just at the edge. He cums barely a few seconds later, fucking into him in fast, hard thrusts as he rides it out.

Taehyung takes a long time to cool down. They both do, it taking an abnormal amount of time for the stars behind their eyes to dissipate, sensation returned to their tingling fingers and toes.

And there it is.

The tender feeling in Taehyung’s chest again. Pulsing and aching and hot. The same feeling he’d felt the moment he’d laid eyes on Jimin, and has felt ever since, even during rushed quickies or casual kisses they share.

Now, it’s more intense. Intense in a way that Taehyung can’t ignore. He looks at Jimin’s face, his sweet face, observing the way he stares up at him. So trusting, so pliant, so wrapped up in his devotion.

Taehyung can’t find the words, so he scoops Jimin up in his arms such that they’re both sitting up, the other boy on his lap. Jimin fits there perfectly, just as he always has, and his arms wrap around his shoulders instinctually. Their chests are pressed together, beating hearts thundering against each other as they’re enclosed in a sacred embrace.

They just sit there for a while, holding each other.

It’s quiet, and Taehyung’s nose is pressed to Jimin’s pulse point. His eyes are open, and they burn. He rubs his hands up and down Jimin’s back, fingers counting the columns of his spine. He caresses the warm and sweaty nape of his neck, fingers then carding through his soft hair.

Jimin’s asleep, Taehyung realizes after a while. He’s fallen asleep just like this, being held by Taehyung. Feeling so safe in the arms of someone he’s given every bit of himself to, offered up every iota of his being on a silver platter. His first kiss, his first time. His first love. Taehyung. There’s not a part of him Taehyung hasn’t touched, not an inch of his soul that Taehyung hasn’t dipped his fingers into and relished. He’s devoured him, yet he’s never sated. Never.

Do you love him?

Taehyung gulps, his throat heavy. There's a concentrated pressure between his ears, and it feels like he's stuck in a vacuum. All he can hear is his heartbeat, all he can feel is Jimin's little heart beating against his. Pumping blood to keep him alive just for him. Only for him, always for him.

No, I don't, he thinks. But it feels cowardly.

Taehyung eventually stands up, carrying Jimin with him, hands firm against the undersides of his thighs. Jimin snuffles in his sleep, a slight discontented whimper leaving his lips at the movement. Taehyung shushes him, hoisting him up higher, smiling when Jimin hugs him tighter, burying his little nose into the safety of his neck.

Taehyung walks over to Jimin's desk, grabs his phone with one hand, and ends the recording.

-

Taehyung watches the video an unhealthy amount of times.

He'd watched it six times the moment he'd gotten home the next morning, observing the way he held Jimin, the way the two of them seemed to be in a bubble so intimate that it was almost difficult to watch. The way Jimin looked so small in his arms, helpless and fragile.

Taehyung wondered if he would smash into a million pieces if he'd ever drop him. Like fine china against hard ground.

He thinks about it all day.

Taehyung doesn't know what's scarier. How easy it would be to break Jimin, or how much he doesn't want to do it. He's afraid of it, because he knows he would lose him. When he tries to picture what might happen, his usually cunning and creative mind is empty. It's blank, like his brain can't conjure up such a possibility.

Things are building. They're growing. It's not as simple as Taehyung and Jimin in their little town, driving around in Taehyung's car and stealing kisses after school. It seemed harder then, at face value, because Taehyung had a threat. But now, despite the fact that Yoongi is miles away and Jimin's all his, he can't help but feel like things have gotten infinitely more difficult in ways he can't pinpoint.

There's a longstanding dread that's taken root in his gut. It keeps growing, its spindly branches shooting and twisting and writhing their way up to his brain. They nag at him.

There are so many things Taehyung wants to tell Jimin. Conversations that can never ever happen, because it'll always mean that it will be the final one.

Taehyung debates deleting the video, because it's making him feel and realize things he doesn't want to.

He doesn't delete the video.

Instead, he keeps watching it. Watching the way Jimin clings to him, and most importantly, his own mannerisms and expressions. The desperate way he clings back to Jimin, rushing to hold and touch and be close.

If anyone looked at them, they'd think they were in love.

Taehyung wonders if he can be the same with others. He tries, attempts being tender and intimate with all the hookups since. But it always repulses him.

Taehyung doesn't sleep well for weeks, and every second is torture.

-

It happens one regular evening.

Taehyung wakes up in the morning and goes to class. It's boring and dull, stacks and stacks of complex reading material about countless parts of the human body added to his to-do list. He uses the 1 hour break in between lectures to go to the campus cafe, where he eats a cheese and tomato sandwich. The girl at the counter who has a crush on him remembers to grill it, knowing his preferences like the back of her hand. Taehyung winks at her as he leaves, and then skips his afternoon classes because he isn't in the mood.

He takes a nap, and a girl from his class texts him because she noticed that he didn't attend the lecture today. She offers to come over and give him her notes, and he agrees. He fucks her, has an underwhelming orgasm and sends her on her way when she tries to stay back and chat.

Taehyung plays video games for the rest of the evening, and then tosses his controller onto the coffee table when he realizes why he's feeling so empty.

He misses Jimin.

Taehyung grabs his car keys and leaves in his sweats, driving straight to the SNU dorms. He's impatient for some reason, his fingers drumming over the steering wheel. He floors it once every signal turns green, and even runs a red light on the last stretch to Jimin's dorm.

Taehyung parks in the visitor's section and walks into the building, skipping the lift and taking the stairs up two at a time.

When he reaches Jimin's room, he knocks, a smile on his face.

There’s no answer.

Taehyung knocks once more.

“Jimin?” he calls, his forehead pressed to the door.

Silence.

Taehyung raps his knuckles against the solid wood, hard enough that the door shakes. It’s almost desperate.

When it’s obvious that Jimin’s either not in or isn’t going to open the door, Taehyung decides to call him.

And Jimin doesn’t answer.

Not after 6 missed calls, back to back.

Me: where are you

Me: where the fuck are you

Me: you’re supposed to be in your room on thursdays, you’re always here

Me: I know you don’t have work

Me: answer my calls

Me: Jimin, answer my calls

Me: Pick up the fucking phone

Radio silence. The messages deliver, but Jimin isn’t online.

Taehyung goes to his social media, seeing if there's anything new. There isn't. He scrolls through his page, checking if he'd missed anything. When he returns to his feed, he notices that Daeun's posted something.

Taehyung clicks open the story, and that's when he loses grip on his last thread of coherence.

It's a video of her at one of the art raves at the usual place, and she pans the camera to show the friends that she's dancing with. She's even tagged the address of the place, asking people to join. There are many faces and it's blurred with the speed at which the angle is being moved, but Taehyung recognizes Jimin in an instant.

He's wearing tight shorts that stop just short of his ass, and some mesh crop top with his belly button exposed. His hair is styled, and he's got some of that neon paint splattered over his collarbones, colourful makeup heavy and loud on his face.

Jimin defied him.

He knew this behaviour would upset Taehyung, and he went ahead and did it anyway. He's dancing, and he's probably acting just like that whore of a man that tried to flirt with Taehyung the last time he went.

The blackout rage sets in.

Taehyung's so angry that he doesn't know what to do with himself. His breathing is ragged, his fingers digging into the phone screen so hard that the protector cracks.

He storms his way out of the dorm and into his car, breaking the speed limit as he drives to the venue. It's the same one as last time. He's furious, his jaw clenched and his eyes stony hard during the journey.

On the way there, his mind conjures up a million different scenarios. A couple of men looking at Jimin appreciatively. It would be so easy to just crowd him from behind, the way Taehyung did to Daeun, and wrap your arms around him to render him immobile. Jimin's lithe and malleable enough for it to be easy. Too easy. Jimin knows what he looks like, he's obviously doing this to get people to stare at him, give him attention. People who aren't Taehyung, people who have no right. They'd kiss up his neck, bring a hand down to grab his ass, and Jimin would practically be asking for it with the way he's dressed-

Taehyung parks haphazardly once he reaches, his car jerking sharply to a halt and spraying dirt over a few stragglers outside the warehouse. He locks his car and storms in, shoving someone to the floor when they try to hand him the LSD patch like last time. It makes him angrier. Jimin must've taken the drug.

Taehyung tears his way through the dancing crowd, eyes manic. The bass of the music thumps in his heart just like it did the first time, strobe lights slicing through the hazy air. He searches through every single face, ignoring the insults hurled at him because of how rough he's being.

Taehyung eventually finds Jimin.

He's laughing and jumping up and down with his friends, and he stops to take a sip from what looks to be a water bottle. His crop top rides up his narrow waist, and Taehyung sees how happy he is. The way he tips his head back as he giggles, clinging onto the arm of some girl.

Taehyung bulldozes through the people in between them and yanks Jimin's arm, immediately dragging him away from his friend, grip harsh. Jimin screams at first, startled, and then his eyes settle upon Taehyung. They widen.

"Hey, let him go-" the girl Jimin was with says, trying to intervene. Taehyung uses one hand to push her and knock her off balance, and she falls to the floor. Jimin gasps, shouting something that doesn't reach Taehyung's ears.

He yanks at Jimin's arm so hard that the other boy flails, nearly tripping on his own feet as he's forced to follow Taehyung.

Taehyung spots a door and kicks it open, shoving Jimin inside and locking it behind him. It's a bathroom, with cold white tiles and a bright exposed lightbulb, sinks and urinals lined up against the wall.

"Tae, what are you doing? My shoulder h-hurts, you did something to my arm-"

Taehyung throws him against the wall, and Jimin crumples, gasping at the painful impact of his bones against the hard tiles as he falls to the ground. He scrabbles over the floor, looking up at Taehyung with wide eyes that immediately spill with tears.

"I warned you," Taehyung spits. "I told you you weren't allowed to go to parties. I told you not to put on this kind of makeup, and wear these clothes. I fucking told you. I told you!" He shouts.

Jimin whimpers, shaking.

"You lied to me," Taehyung accuses, cornering him. He looks at Jimin's exposed thighs, the way his pale stomach peeks out of his top, nipples visible through the fabric.

Slut

"It's just for the event since everyone dresses like this, and I didn't, I told y-you I was going out today with friends a few days ago. I w-wanted to try it just once, p-please-"

Taehyung hauls him up by his neck, dragging him to a dirty sink. He holds Jimin against the wall next to it with a hand on his throat, pushing his face towards his.

"You look like a fucking whore," he spits, his hot breath hitting his skin. "How many dicks have you sucked tonight, huh? Bet you've been a nice cumdump for all the men here. Is that

why you didn’t answer the phone? Too busy getting rawed to care about your boyfriend, right?”

Jimin’s staring at him, tears flowing endlessly as he chokes slightly underneath Taehyung’s rough grip. He’s shaking so hard that the vibrations of it travel up Taehyung’s arm. Taehyung turns on the tap, grabbing a handful of water.

He rubs it harshly over Jimin’s face, trying to remove the makeup. It smears over his skin instead, creating a bluish black mess. He does it over and over, and Jimin sputters when some of the water goes up his nose.

“Tae, s-stop it, please-” he sobs, his voice tinny as he speaks around the tight grip on his throat.

Taehyung ignores him, continuing to make a mess of his face.

Jimin tries to push him off, and he snaps.

All he knows is that his knuckles surge with a burning ache, and Jimin’s thrown to the floor with the impact of the blow to his face.

The other boy’s head collides against the hard edge of a sink in the fall down and the sound echoes loudly. Taehyung stares. The skin of Jimin’s forehead splits open, spilling blood onto the tiles where he curls up over the floor.

He’s extremely still for a few seconds before he starts to move.

Jimin crawls over the ground, trying to reach the door. His breathing is heavy and panicked, a trail of blood dripping over the tiles and his left arm sluggish.

Taehyung pulls him back with strong grips on his ankles, ignoring Jimin's scream as he hauls him up once more, grip rough and punishing on his hair. He wrenches his fingers in the silky strands painfully, yanking Jimin up to his knees. His body flails over the ground, twisted at an odd angle.

"Where the fuck are you going, huh? We're still talking."

"Stop it, stop it!" Jimin bawls through slurred words, his cheekbone already swelling from the hit. His blood drips down his face and stains his clothes.

There's a pounding on the door.

"Jimin!"

It's Daeun.

"Jimin, are you okay? Taehyung, open this fucking door right now!"

Taehyung squeezes a hand over Jimin's mouth, silencing his scream.

"Shut the fuck up," he spits, mere inches from Jimin's face. The other boy's chest heaves with his sobs, and he seems to be petrified beyond belief. His eyes are blown wide and he struggles for oxygen with the way Taehyung's large hand covers both his mouth and nose, his face a mess of blood, tears, snot and congealing smeared makeup mixed with dirty tap water.

Daeun continues pounding on the door and yelling from the outside, but Taehyung ignores her.

"Did you take the drug they gave you? Are you high right now?"

Jimin tries to shake his head, but Taehyung pulls his hand away and shoves two of his fingers down Jimin's throat to check for the patch.

And then Jimin bites him. Hard enough to tear through his skin.

Taehyung yanks his hand back, and Jimin dashes for the door with legs that don't seem to cooperate. Or he tries to. Taehyung tackles him to the ground, and Jimin screams in pain as Taehyung slaps him across the face, almost as hard as before.

"Did you just bite me? You fucking bitch, stop fucking fighting back-"

The door to the bathroom slams open, and Taehyung looks up to see Daeun and some burly man who she'd obviously enlisted to help. Taehyung's thrown off Jimin, and he wastes no time in fighting back against the guy. The man gets a few punches in, but Taehyung's instincts from Taekwondo help him get the upper hand instantly.

In just a few seconds, the man is unconscious on the floor, face down as Taehyung stands over him and gives him a hard kick to the back. He spits on him before turning around.

Jimin's gone. There's no trace of him, or Daeun.

Just a trail of blood over the floor outside the bathroom that shines in the UV lights. Taehyung follows it until it disappears. When he figures out that Jimin isn't here and has escaped, he leaves, getting into his car.

He nearly bashes his steering wheel in, screaming so loud that the vehicle almost shakes.

The anger takes hours to dissipate.

By the time it does, Taehyung's seated on his couch with blooming bruises around his right eye and mouth, gashed fingers, and Jimin's blood all over his hands. His heartbeat is loud in his ears, and there's a sense of doom spreading through every fibre of his being.

He tries calling Jimin, but it says that his phone is switched off.

Me: Babe

Me: fuck, i'm so sorry

Me: I didn't mean to, I promise. I just lost control for a second

Me: Jimin please respond

Me: I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry

Me: I love you

Me: Please reply

Me: Jimin I'm begging you

Me: I didn't mean for it to happen, i promise

Me: Let's talk about this, I'll make it up to you

Me: Let's have lunch tomorrow at that American restaurant you were telling me about, ok?

None of them deliver.

Chapter End Notes

Ok, phew!! That was a big one...a lot to unpack this chapter.

And that's the seventh chapter. If you enjoyed it or would like to share your thoughts, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!! And did y'all notice the subtle entrance of one of the characters...

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 8: Salted Wound

Chapter Notes

ANNOUNCEMENT: THIS FIC WILL NOW BE UPDATED WEEKLY!!!!!!!

I understand that the wait was a bit long for you guys. And for me as well haha. And I will do as the council declares!!!!!

Here's the eighth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

Beautiful moodboard made by Ina (cappuccinokyu) <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Taehyung waits days.

There's no word from Jimin, and his phone is switched off. He tries calling at odd hours, just to see if it rings, but ultimately always ends up being met with the automated message that tells him that the user has their device turned off.

Daeun hasn't been active either. She hasn't responded to Taehyung's angry texts demanding an explanation, nor has she reached out. If he thinks about it, why would she?

Namjoon's still amiable though. Taehyung hangs out with him more often than not, dodging questions about the bruises on his face and his bandaged hand. Taehyung calls in sick for his classes and practice.

Taehyung goes to Jimin's dorm one evening.

If Jimin isn't going to respond, Taehyung is going to force a conversation. This is getting out of hand. It's been nearly a week. Maybe if he sees Taehyung's injuries he'll feel sorry for him.

Taehyung parks again with a startling halt, the tires screeching against the asphalt and making a few students hanging around jump. He gets out of the car, slamming the door shut, and walks toward the entrance.

"Excuse me, do you live here?" He hears a voice pipe up from next to him. Taehyung doesn't bother to look, hoping the way he inputs the code with confidence is enough of an answer. He walks up the stairs, making his way to Jimin's door with a sure stride.

He knocks, the sound loud and urged.

"Jimin, open the door," he says, voice stern. "We need to talk."

The door swings open a few moments later, but it's Jimin's stupid nerdy roommate. He squawks up at Taehyung, furrowing his eyebrows.

"Who are you?"

"Where's Jimin?" Taehyung asks, pushing his way past the other boy and into the room.

"H-Hey! You can't come in here-"

"Where's Jimin?" Taehyung asks once more, noticing the way that Jimin's side of the room is made neatly, not a thing out of place. His bed doesn't look like it's been slept in in a while.

“He’s not here,” the other boy says. “I haven’t seen him in a week. Is he okay?”

“What about class? Has he been attending? Have you heard from his classmates?”

“No, he called in sick in one of the classes we share.”

Taehyung clenches his jaw. Where the fuck is he? He tries to think, his mind going through every single possibility of where Jimin could be. It can’t be Daeun’s place, because it’s way too small. Or could it?

The younger boy then pushes his thick glasses up the bridge of his nose, furrowing his eyebrows as he attempts to muster up some courage.

“H-He’s not here as you can see. I must ask you to leave now-”

“Shut the fuck up, you little cunt,” Taehyung spits, closing his eyes as he focuses. “Can’t you see I’m trying to think?”

Jimin’s roommate’s mouth clamps shut, clearly offended and shocked but too intimidated to do anything about it. Taehyung could snap him like a twig.

He doesn’t know who any of Jimin’s friends are. There are people on his social media, but he can’t talk to them at the risk of them finding out about their relationship. He feels tied.

“Are you sure he didn’t tell you anything about where he is? No texts?”

“I don’t have a phone…” the other boy says, his mouth curved downward.

“God, you’re such a fucking loser,” Taehyung sighs, then looking him in the eyes. “If I find out you’re lying, there’ll be trouble. What’s your name?”

“H-Hae Duho. And please don’t curse.”

“Okay, Hae Duho. The moment you see Jimin, tell him that I’m looking for him.”

“I’m actually dropping out. I’ll be leaving the dorms next week, so…”

Taehyung stares at him, eyes narrowed.

“I’m transferring to a Christian university closer to home. This city is full of so much sin, I-”

“I didn’t ask. Just do what I told you to do,” Taehyung interrupts, turning around to leave.

“Who are you? Are you his brother or something?” Duho’s voice is nasal yet the question doesn’t have any bite. You can tell that it’s just the way he talks, a product of a restricted and sheltered upbringing. Jimin has mentioned several times that his roommate is very sweet despite being rigid and unrefined with his words.

He’s a child, just like Jimin is.

Taehyung lacks the empathy to be kind.

“I’m the person who fucks him into the mattress whenever you’re off at bible study or wherever the fuck it is you go to so often. Didn’t know he was into guys, did you? He didn’t want you to find out in case it made you uncomfortable.”

Duho's mouth drops open, and then his eyes brim with tears.

"Oh no…I hugged him…"

Taehyung smirks, leaning in close.

"I guess that means you caught the *gay*. I'd start begging Jesus for forgiveness right now if I were you."

Taehyung leaves Duho in a mess of tears and in the midst of a panic attack.

He drives straight to Daeun's house. He has to check. Just to be sure. He knows she's not at Namjoon's right now, and if Jimin isn't at hers, she'll still probably know where he is.

It's a 40 minute journey. Taehyung stops on the way to get something to eat, even picking up a bag of candy for Jimin in case he's there. He wonders how he'll react, thinking about it absentmindedly as he navigates his way through Seoul traffic. He looks at the passenger seat, travelling back to the endless memories he has of Jimin sitting there across the years.

Jimin is going to be upset with Taehyung because he hit him.

Taehyung didn't even hit him that hard. He wasn't even planning to hurt him, just scare him, but before he knew it he'd formed a fist and-

His anger issues. They're the ones to blame. And Jimin, for lying to him and provoking him.

Taehyung's never gotten to this point before, and there's a reason for that.

He'll sit Jimin down, have a conversation with him about why he shouldn't be angry. And why he's also responsible for what happened. The blame doesn't all lie with Taehyung.

When he reaches Daeun's building, he parks quickly and takes a breather. He needs to be calm and composed, extend the time it takes before he snaps and his temper gets the better of him. He needs to have the patience. He has to, even if he technically shouldn't in his eyes.

Taehyung steps out of the car and walks to the cheap glass door. There's a security system, which surprises Taehyung considering how run down the area is.

He punches in the button to Daeun's door.

It takes around 30 seconds, but the speaker buzzes and Daeun's warped and sleepy voice echoes through the system.

"Hello?"

"It's me."

Daeun curses.

"What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Is Jimin up there with you?"

Her response is immediate, too quick to be believable.

"No, he's not. Fuck off."

“Let me up.”

“No.”

“I don’t believe you. I want to check myself.”

“*You’re fucking crazy if you think I’m going to let a psychopath like you up to my apartment.”*

“It’s either that, or I break down this flimsy door and raze yours to the floor.”

“Yeah, and I’ll call the cops before you reach the stairs.”

Taehyung laughs, feeling the anger bubble up within him. His jaw clenches, fingers drumming against his thigh in a practised rhythm to help calm himself down.

“I know you know where he is. You can’t hide up there forever. Tell him to call me.”

Daeun’s silent for a few seconds.

“You hurt him, Taehyung. He’s injured…did you know that? Do you care?”

“How the fuck would I know that when he won’t fucking call me?” Taehyung spits, raising his voice.

“Because you did it.”

“Fuck you. I don’t need morality lessons from a loose slut.”

Another few seconds of silence.

“*You come here again, and I’ll really call the cops.”*

The line goes dead after that.

Taehyung punches the glass screen of the system and shatters it, then walks over to the mail locker, kicking it over and over till it’s dented and cracked. He kicks over the waste bins outside, gets into his car and drives away.

He’s 5 minutes away from his apartment when he receives a call from an unknown number. Taehyung accepts, the call routed through the bluetooth system of this car.

“Hello?” His voice is rough.

There’s some shaky breathing on the other end that Taehyung recognizes immediately. He swerves sharply to the right and pulls over in an alley, narrowly missing a child.

“Jimin?” He half yells. “Baby-”

“P-Please stop trying to find me. I don’t want to see you right now.” Jimin’s voice is watery but still intact, fragile.

“Did you change your number?”

“I’m calling from a payphone. Please stop threatening my friends, and coming to my dorm. Please s-stop it.”

“Jimin,” he says then, softening. “I’m sorry. Please, let’s meet and talk about this. Please-”

“You broke your promise,” Jimin says, and his breath hitches, followed by a sniffle. *“You promised you wouldn’t hurt me.”*

“I know, I know, I’m sorry-”

“Are you really sorry?”

“Yes. Of course I am,” Taehyung responds without missing a beat, his eyes wide.

“I don’t believe you.”

There’s a sudden vacuum between Taehyung’s ears. Everything falls silent. His stomach drops, a cold sweat burning his skin. Jimin’s next words are loud and clear.

“We can’t be together anymore, Taehyung,” Jimin sobs.

Time stops.

“What? What the fuck are you talking about?” Taehyung asks, his voice ragged. His head is spinning, and his throat is heavy. He can hear his heartbeat thundering in his ears and his stomach drops to the ground.

“We c-can’t keep doing this. It’s just b-been getting worse, and you’ll hurt me again. I know you w-will, my stomach has been telling me to run for a while now and I can’t ignore it anymore-”

“Baby, don’t make a mistake…let’s meet and talk about this, okay? You’re just emotional right now.”

All he can hear is Jimin sobbing on the other end of the line.

His silence is enough for Taehyung to know he’s considering it.

“Don’t cry, my love. I’m sorry, I love you so much, you know that? I love you so fucking much…please don’t leave me… don’t throw it all away,” Taehyung continues, desperate. He can feel his heart rattling in his ribcage, fighting to push its way out through his chest. He gnaws at his lower lip, and it feels like there’s a hollow in his chest.

“You’ll do it again…”

“I won’t, I’d never. I promise, okay? I’ll never hurt you again.”

“Daeun says I should leave you. That once you hit me it’ll just keep happening, like a cycle.”

“What the fuck would she know, huh? You’re the one dating me, not her,” Taehyung spits, anger and disbelief at Daeun’s audacity washing over him in waves.

“I need time, Tae. P-Please just leave me alone for now.”

“Jimin-”

“If I feel like talking to you I’ll call again. But for now, please don’t try to meet me or contact me.”

“We’re still together, right?”

All he can hear is Jimin’s shaky breathing for a long while.

“I d-don’t know.”

The call disconnects.

Taehyung just sits there for a while, in disbelief. Evening turns to nightfall, and it’s just him sitting in his car with the engine still running, Seoul thriving outside the lonely alley he’s tucked in.

There’s a pulsing ache in his temples, and his breathing is choppy as his mind runs. Taehyung can’t comprehend it. He can’t handle it. It doesn’t make any sense to him, the idea that Jimin wouldn’t want to date him.

He thinks about who’s to blame for everything that’s happened.

The only person he can think of is Daeun.

She’s the one who befriended Jimin, corrupted him, and caused this to happen. She even intervened during their conversation at the warehouse, even having the gall to convince Jimin to leave him. Taehyung did warn her.

And he always makes good on his promises. Or threats, rather.

The drive to Namjoon's apartment goes by quicker than he'd thought. He pulls into the parking space just outside, yanks down the sun visor and stares at himself in the mirror. After a few minutes of practising his most forlorn and heartbroken expressions, Taehyung leaves and heads up to the other man's flat.

Namjoon takes a little while to answer the door but he does with a wide smile, one that falls immediately upon noticing Taehyung's distress.

"Is everything okay?" He asks, tugging Taehyung in.

"Not really, hyung. I need to talk to you and get something off my chest."

Namjoon frowns and nods, leading Taehyung to the sofa. They sit down, and Taehyung takes a moment to breathe in the way Namjoon's looking at him with soft concerned eyes, his brows furrowed.

"Tell me what's wrong," the other older man prods, resting a warm hand on Taehyung's shoulder.

"I don't know how to tell you this…I'm scared."

"Don't be. It's always better to be honest."

Taehyung pretends to take a few deep breaths, his eyes trained on the warm oak coffee table.

"I've been sleeping with Daeun for the past few months."

Namjoon doesn't seem to have heard him, not for the first few seconds after the words leave

his mouth. But something in his eyes changes, a subtle shift that somehow manages to steal his youth.

His hand slips off his shoulder.

“I’m sorry, what?”

“It’s true, hyung. It’s been eating me up inside, but-”

“This isn’t funny, Taehyung,” Namjoon says, his voice hard.

“I’m not kidding…I wish I was,” Taehyung breathes out, clenching his jaw. “I’m so sorry, hyung.”

Namjoon seems to be at a loss for words, his eyes wide.

“I don’t believe you,” he eventually says, his words just the slightest bit shaky. “Daeun wouldn’t do that to me. She loves me.”

“I can show you, hyung,” Taehyung insists as he pulls out his phone. He opens up his chat with Daeun, scrolling back up to when things were good between them. He hands him his phone then, letting him read all of the messages, the odd picture or two they’d exchange.

Namjoon’s not breathing. Taehyung’s phone looks oddly small in his large hands, and he doesn’t miss the way Namjoon’s eyes grow wet, his chest trembling as his heart breaks.

“I understand if you don’t want to talk to me anymore, hyung…but I wasn’t the one who started it. She was the one who wouldn’t leave me alone the day after we met again for the first time. She manipulated me. And I was so lonely here in a new city, I fell for it, but it’s been weighing down on me so heavily…you deserved to know.”

Namjoon looks so small. He looks the most vulnerable Taehyung's ever seen him, none of his usual easygoing confidence and safe aura shining through.

"Don't act innocent in this," is all Namjoon says. "You know how much I love her. I even told you I wanted to marry her."

"I'm not," Taehyung answers immediately. "I haven't been able to sleep since, hyung. You can hit me if you want, if it'll make you feel better."

"Violence fixes nothing," Namjoon responds straightly. "It's not going to change what you've done. It's not going to make things better for me. Did our friendship mean nothing to you? I loved you like you were my own brother."

It did mean something to Taehyung, and he's not sure how to respond. He doesn't know why he does the things he does, why he is the way he is. He doesn't know, and he's not sure whether he wants to cultivate the curiosity to find out.

His silence prompts Namjoon's response.

"Get out, Taehyung," he says, his voice hard. His head is tilted away, and Taehyung sees a teardrop fall from his eye onto his sweats. "I don't ever want to see or hear from you again."

"I'm sorry, hyung," Taehyung states, standing up once he picks up his phone that'd fallen from Namjoon's hands onto the table.

He leaves silently, not bothering to look back as he presses Namjoon's door shut behind him.

Taehyung wonders if he did the right thing. There's a sense of vindication somewhere deep within, but it's still shadowed overwhelmingly by a strange sort of heartbreak when he

recounts his conversation with Jimin. Daeun had it coming. She'll know not to mess with him, got what she bargained for. Her sanctity shattered.

Taehyung loses Jimin, she loses Namjoon.

It's so simple. Simple and effective, and satisfying. His own warped system of justice.

Then why does Taehyung feel hollow as he tries to sleep that night? He takes 5 sleeping pills, but they don't help in the slightest. Every thought grates across the inside of his skull.

His bed has never felt so empty. His phone's full of messages from friends, yet his chat with Jimin is abandoned, has been for 5 days. He doesn't recall such a situation happening before. Jimin has always texted him frequently, his chat always taking the spot at the top, ever since they met.

Why do you care?

The thought materializes out of nowhere.

Taehyung's heart starts to pulse in his chest.

He's always loathed Jimin's constant texts, barely reads half of them when he can be arsed to. He used to hate how Jimin would want to cuddle, used to despise how easily Jimin would fall asleep after sex, which would make it infinitely harder to wake him and kick him out. When did he start enjoying it, craving it? He can't seem to pinpoint the pivotal moment on their timeline.

It's all his own doing. Letting it get this far. A ruse turned into a sordid reality.

Thinking about it keeps him up all night, up until he somehow manages to fall asleep.

-

Taehyung wakes up to pounding on his door.

A look at his bedside clock tells him it's past 11 am. He's slept through his morning classes. The thought process is interrupted by more incessant banging, his door shaking with the force of it.

Taehyung frowns, getting out of bed and heading towards the door.

He pulls it open, and he's confronted with the sight of Daeun.

She's glaring at him, seething, tears streaming down her face. The mascara decorates her cheeks like inky spiderwebs.

"You fucking told him," she spits, half sobs. She enters, shoving him back a few paces. "You told him, you fucking asshole!"

Taehyung shrugs, smirking.

"I did warn you."

She stares at him, her chest heaving. He's never seen her this way, hasn't seen much more than irritation in her demeanour.

"So how'd he do it?" Taehyung muses, sitting down on his couch. "Did he text you or call saying that he needs to talk? He must've confronted you about it all serious and mature. Hyung's totally the type to do that. I would've killed me if I was him."

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Daeun questions, seeming so disconcerted that she’s overcome with it. “He d-didn’t deserve that. He didn’t deserve it.”

Taehyung laughs.

“He didn’t deserve it, no. But he also kind of did, by dating a whore like you. All I had to do was touch you once and you were drenched.”

Her eyes are wide, and she’s shaking.

“You had it all, Daeun. I would’ve left your perfect little life alone, but you had to ruin mine,” Taehyung says, smiling. “You had to go and stick your fucking nose where it didn’t belong.”

“How is you physically abusing your boyfriend my fault?” Daeun asks, her voice fragile. She seems to be in disbelief.

“Because it *is* your fault. You took him to that party. He’s a little stupid, but he wouldn’t have disobeyed me if it weren’t for you. You dressed him up like a prostitute, got him doped up on drugs, took him somewhere I *explicitly* told him not to go to, and you thought I wouldn’t do something about it?”

“You’re fucking crazy, you’re-”

“He didn’t speak to me until yesterday. Didn’t respond to any of my texts and calls. That’s your fault-”

“He didn’t respond to you because he couldn’t,” Daeun spits. “He had a severe concussion. Couldn’t talk straight or walk normally or do anything for a while. All he did was fucking cry. Doctors said his skull almost cracked, or it could’ve been an intracranial haemorrhage.

These should be familiar terms for you. It could've been fatal. You're so fucking lucky that he passed it off as a fall, you have no idea. Some fucking doctor you'll be if you have no idea what you did."

Taehyung falls silent then, caught off guard.

"And he didn't take any drugs. Didn't even drink. We were all making fun of him, calling him a baby, but now I know why he seemed so scared…it's because of you," Daeun adds, her eyes wide. "You can't blame anyone but yourself for everything that's happened."

"You have such a saviour complex," Taehyung spits then, trying to deflect from the earlier information. He doesn't know how to process it. He didn't hit Jimin that hard, and his head hitting the sink wasn't what he intended-

"That's all you have to say?" She seems aghast.

"What else do you want me to say?"

"Maybe that you're sorry? What the fuck?"

"I didn't even hit him that hard-"

"You're literally going to med school, did my words mean nothing to you? You're twice his size, and you punched him with what seemed to be everything you had. Just fucking own up to it, you piece of shit. You're the most vile person I've ever come across. How did he fuck up so bad by dating you?"

"It doesn't matter, because we're still together. He loves me."

"I'll tell him."

“Tell him what?” Taehyung asks.

“That we fucked. That you’ve been cheating on him since forever. I’ll t-tell him.”

Taehyung stands up then, walking over to her and forcing her into a corner. She cowers slightly, trembling.

“An eye for an eye, huh? Poor little Jiminie’s all injured and broken, and you’re going to hurt him further by telling him something he doesn’t need to know?” Taehyung muses, tone light. “Could drive him to extreme actions…incited by impulse and grief.”

Daeun seems to deflate then.

“I know you’re mad because I told Namjoon,” Taehyung says then. “I know your life’s broken to bits. But Namjoon will be fine. It might take time, but you know he will. Telling Jimin will only destroy him. You wouldn’t want that, right? He’s struggled with it before, self harm. Took me everything to get him out of it,” he lies smoothly.

“I’ll get him help…that’ll be better than you hurting him,” Daeun says, seemingly to convince herself, her tears sticky on her cheeks.

“Who says I’m going to hurt him now? I’m not, because the two of you know not to go against me again. And you also know that telling Jimin will destroy your friendship with him. I know you’re fond of him, that he’s your cute little dongsaeng that you can patronize about his silly art. He looks up to you so much. You’ll shatter his heart to pieces, and lose yet another person who’s important to you.”

“Why do you belittle him so much?” Daeun asks then. “He’s so bright…and smart, and strong. There’s nothing small about him.”

“Because he’s mine,” Taehyung answers plainly. “He always has been. That’s not going to change. It never will.”

Daeun stares at him for a while, seemingly hours.

She eventually leaves, with none of the noise or energy with which she’d entered.

-

Despite Jimin asking for time, Taehyung grants him none.

He’s always blowing up his phone. The automated message that tells him that the device is switched off etches itself into the synapses of his brain. He hears it even when he isn’t calling Jimin, which is usually only when he’s showering or doing anything that requires both hands.

Taehyung will call till Jimin answers. He’s even lied about a slight ankle injury so that he can get out of practice. The one day he was in the pool, he was plagued with anxiety that Jimin would finally call back and he wouldn’t be around to answer. He’s been skipping practical sessions because for those, phones are never allowed in the examination rooms or theatres.

He’s anxious, restless, stout with a thrumming energy that pokes and prods at his skin from within.

It’s a sunny afternoon being spent in solitude in his apartment, the air stilted and icy cold with his air conditioning.

Taehyung stares at his phone screen, watching as his current call to Jimin ends with the switched off message yet again. That doesn’t stop him from trying once more. He goes back to his call log and redials the number, then switching his window to Daeun’s chat as it rings.

Me: tell Jimin to call me

Me: tell him

She sees the messages but doesn't respond.

Me: is he feeling better? Tell him I miss him.

Me: you must be so lonely now, Daeun

Me: I feel sorry for you

Daeun: stop messaging me

Me: I will when you tell Jimin to come home and meet me

Me: I'm so pent up. I haven't had sex in a week

Me: This is torture

Taehyung types it out instinctively, wondering why he's divulging such details to Daeun, especially given everything that's happened. Perhaps it's because he truly doesn't have anyone to talk to, be this honest and unrestrained with. It's always a facade with everyone else. The thought is quite sobering, in a way that sends him further down the rabbit hole he's already in.

But it's true. He doesn't remember the last time he's gone this long without fucking someone.

And doesn't that, if nothing else, prove how much this all means to him?

He's on his way to writing her his next coarse message when the typing bar disappears and a popup appears on the screen.

Daeun blocked him.

Taehyung scoffs, something akin to ice settling into his veins. He feels like his last outlet is gone. He opens up his chat with Jimin, immediately coming face to face with the barrage of undelivered messages he's already sent him. They range from pleas to angry texts to words of love, all a vicious cycle depending on Taehyung's mood and temperament at that moment.

His fingers fly across the keyboard, frustration evident as he types out the words.

Me: I'm getting tired of this

Me: I don't know how many times you want me to apologize

Me: I don't know what you want from me.

Me: I'm only human

Me: This is getting old, Jimin

Me: I'm so close to being done with this attitude of yours

Me: And trust me, you don't want that

Me: Call me.

As usual, the messages don't deliver, which means that Jimin's phone still isn't connected to service.

Taehyung's had enough.

Just then, he receives a text. He frowns as he clicks it open.

Unknown Number: Hi, is this Taehyung?

Me: Yeah. Who's this

Unknown Number: Oh!! Hi!! This is Areum. We have biochem together?

Taehyung doesn't even attempt to place her.

Me: what's up?

Unknown Number: I was wondering if you wanted to hang out sometime…the truth is I've kinda liked you for a while but I've been too shy to come talk to you.

Unknown Number: Sorry if this is weird

Taehyung raises an eyebrow. It is off putting, her forwardness. But it's also easy. He could use a stress buster.

Me: Send me a picture of yourself.

Me: Just so I can confirm it's you

She sends it without much preamble. She's pretty enough, he supposes. Taehyung's never seen her before, but then, he doesn't really pay much attention at all to the people around him, least of all in class.

Unknown Number: Happy?

Me: Very. I'm actually free right now

Me: You can come over, if you'd like :)

Me: [Address]

His doorbell rings 10 minutes later.

The moment he opens the door, she's already smiling, wearing a short dress with lots of bold makeup spread across her features.

"That was fast," he laughs, smirking as he opens the door further to allow her to enter.

"I was in the area."

Somehow, Taehyung finds that hard to believe, and a little strange. But he also doesn't want to think right now. He's confident in the way he pulls her in and kisses her, not noticing the way his front door is left slightly ajar rather than fully closed.

"What's the rush?" She asks against his lips.

"Did you think this was a date? I don't do relationships," Taehyung clarifies, leading them to his couch. She doesn't protest much after that, simply eyeing his corded muscles once he takes his shirt off. Where Taehyung was still slightly gangly back in highschool, he's gained a lot of bulk during his last year or so at college. He's grown into his broad frame, finally big enough to fill out his wide shoulders and height. The frequent swimming adds to it, building his legs up and defining his abs such that they're clear cut now.

The entire time, during the rushed foreplay and the way they tear at each other's clothes, Taehyung can't seem to shake the feeling that something's off.

This girl, she's a little too confident. She doesn't gasp when he does things that typically overwhelm other girls, and she isn't touchy. Almost like she's using him just as much as he's using her.

Something's wrong.

Taehyung ignores it. He's probably still just stressed about this whole Jimin situation. Once he's able to fuck the tension out of his system, he'll feel much better. He knows he will.

He sits back on his haunches, reaching for the built-in drawer in his coffee table to pull out a condom. He tears it open and slides it onto his cock in a smooth practiced motion, then leaning forward and slotting himself between her splayed thighs. Her hands creep up to his lower back, pulling him closer as he pushes in.

She smiles at him then, and there's something slightly cunning about it.

Taehyung raises an eyebrow at her, rolling his hips.

"What?" he prods, frowning.

She just smiles wider.

Taehyung decides he can't shake the feeling off anymore. He's getting angry, and can feel his temper shrinking down and his frustration boiling up. What the fuck is she smiling about? There's something oddly familiar about her, he suddenly realizes.

"Who the fuck are you? I-"

Just then, a sob echoes through the apartment.

The sound startles Taehyung, and his spine freezes up. It suddenly feels like there's cotton between his ears, and an icy chill spreads across his veins.

No no no no

Taehyung turns around, eyes wide as he sees Jimin standing in his doorway.

Jimin's face is covered in tears, and it's almost like he can't seem to believe what he's seeing. His vision dances over Taehyung and then the girl, then to the way they're obviously fucking. The right side of his face and neck are a jarring blend of patchy yellow and mottled blue from the healing bruises, and he's got some nasty stitches on his forehead. His left arm is in a sling cast.

He sobs once more, audibly, his free hand slapping over his mouth.

Taehyung's brain short circuits. He pulls out, and shoves the girl off the couch as he scrabbles for his pants.

She doesn't seem to be surprised in the slightest, calmly getting back into her dress.

Taehyung yanks his sweats on and stumbles his way to Jimin, who immediately pushes him away with a weak hand on his chest.

"Stay away from me-"

"Jimin, please," Taehyung gasps, his eyes wide.

He grabs Jimin, pressing him against the wall as he protests. "It isn't what it looks like, I promise."

"I should've just believed her-" Jimin bawls.

"Believed whom?" Taehyung demands, shaking Jimin by the shoulders when he doesn't respond. "What are you talking about?"

“We got you, you fucking asshole,” the girl behind him speaks. “I’m not even from your course. Daeun knew you would bite. He’s been cheating on you for a very long time, Jimin.”

It clicks for Taehyung then. He just got set up. This girl, she’s one of Daeun’s friends. That’s where he’d seen her before.

So she did tell Jimin, after all.

“I trusted you,” Jimin confesses quietly. “She told me everything that happened, between the two of you, and how you’ve been all this while. And I didn’t believe her. Because I insisted, believed that you’d never do this to me.”

“I’m not, I wouldn’t-” Taehyung pleads although he grits the words out, his hold on Jimin’s shoulders growing harsh.

“She told me to come here and see for myself.” Jimin chokes out a bitter laugh through his tears. “And all this while, on the way here, I was hoping I would prove her wrong, even though I saw the way you responded to Areum’s messages immediately-”

“Jimin, just listen to me. Please, just-” Taehyung coaxes, slamming Jimin back against the wall when he tries to rise up and walk out the door. “Stop trying to leave.”

“Jimin, don’t. Let’s go,” the girl cuts in. “He’s not worth it.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Taehyung spits, whipping his head towards her.

Jimin’s still staring up at him with wide, hollow eyes. His face is blank, but Taehyung feels the way he’s trembling, the tears flowing endlessly down his cheeks. His expression twitches ever so often, as if trying to squash down his own heartbreak, tamper down his sobs.

“I want to talk to him,” Jimin says then. “Thanks…Areum. I just need to talk to him.”

“You don’t have to do that!” The girl exclaims. “This is exactly what Daeun was talking about! You need to stop letting him-”

“I’m not letting him do anything,” Jimin snaps then, his voice breaking. “I just need to hear it from him. How he’s been lying to me for years.”

Taehyung stares down at him, his own jaw clenched.

“Suit yourself,” Areum says then, seeming sad and disappointed. She leaves then, and Jimin waits till the door’s shut before he speaks.

“Do you love me?”

Taehyung wasn’t expecting that. He’s still got Jimin forced up against the wall, afraid that he’ll leave even though the door’s now shut.

“Yes,” he responds.

A fresh wave of tears spill from Jimin’s eyes, even though his face is still blank.

“Tell me the truth. Do you love me?”

“Yes,” Taehyung repeats. “I love you.”

Jimin snaps then.

“Don’t fucking LIE!” He screeches, his strong facade shattering into a storm of broken sobs. He shoves at Taehyung’s chest, catching him off guard and sending him stumbling a few steps back. “All this while, you’ve been cheating on me-”

“I haven’t! I promise-”

“How could you do this to me?”

“Daeun’s lying, she’s lying to you.”

“I just caught you having sex with someone else,” Jimin says, shrinking as he hears himself. He inhales shakily. “Be honest. Just for once. Be honest with me.”

Taehyung’s silent, eyes wide and burning.

“Say something!” Jimin shrieks. “You always had a lot to say about me and what I was doing. Checking my phone, obsessing about who I was talking to, where I was going, what I was wearing, all while you were being everything you accused me to be!” He spits. “Take a look, Taehyung. Look at my face, and look at my arm. This is what you did because you just *thought* I was with someone else. Just look! You’re a hypocrite!”

“Lower your voice.”

“You’re a- you’re-”

“Listen to me,” Taehyung says then, voice stable. He takes Jimin’s shaking wrists in his grasp, gentle with the one that’s in the cast. “I told you that this isn’t what it looks like. Stop fucking yelling, and let me talk.”

Jimin seems to be at a loss for words.

"I'm sorry about what you saw…" Taehyung starts, swallowing. "I'm sorry for hurting you. But this isn't a regular thing. I just made a mistake once and gave into her advances because I was so heartbroken that you wouldn't answer my calls-"

Jimin scoffs.

"And Daeun? You were sleeping together for months? Are you gonna say it was another mistake because I wasn't in Seoul yet?"

Taehyung's gaze burns holes into him.

"It's funny, because I had no issues staying pathetically loyal to you!" Jimin screams. "Molding myself to be everything that pleases you, putting my own comfort and safety on the line to be what you wanted, every single minute of every single day! And I did it willingly, because I loved you. And I wanted so *badly* to be loved by you. I've given every bit of myself to you…and you threw it away…you threw me away, you betrayed me!"

Taehyung surges forward to wipe away his tears once Jimin sobs, his face scrunching up. The other boy immediately tries to bat his hands away, failing. Taehyung's thumbs glide over his cheeks, catching the salty drops.

"I didn't throw you away…I would never. I-I'm not perfect, alright? I know I fucked up, but I promise, it's just her and Daeun, I swear. No one else."

"You've poisoned it, you've poisoned us."

We were poisoned right from the start

“Tell me,” Jimin mutters then, finally shrugging himself out of his grip. He walks further into the living room, putting some space in between them. “Where am I lacking? What part of me isn’t enough for you?”

Taehyung’s head is starting to hurt. The pain throbs through his skull, aching and rampant against his senses.

“Do you think I’m stupid? Stupid enough to keep eating up your lies over and over?” Jimin yells.

“They’re not lies,” Taehyung refutes immediately. “I know I fucked up, but at the very least just *listen* to me-”

“I don’t owe you anything,” Jimin declares. “And there’s only one way to find out whether you’re telling the truth.”

The other boy’s eyes glance over Taehyung’s phone that lays still unlocked on the coffee table.

Taehyung’s face pales.

Jimin lunges for Taehyung’s phone at the same time he does.

The other boy grabs the device first and runs toward the bathroom. Taehyung chases, reaching out to grab Jimin’s arm and stop him but the other boy just manages to slink out of his grip, slamming and locking the door shut behind him in the nick of time. Taehyung ends up crashing bodily against the wood, the sound loud and seemingly shaking the whole apartment.

Taehyung pounds his fist against the door, closing his eyes to swallow down and dampen the dangerous cocktail of panic and anger rising up within him. He's going to black out again, he can feel it.

"Jimin, open the door."

He can hear Jimin's ragged breathing on the other end.

There's some silence for nearly a minute, and then he sobs. It's the most broken one Taehyung's ever heard from him, echoing pure defeat and a heartbreak so deep it just might kill you.

"I knew it…I knew…"

"Open the fucking door." Taehyung demands, his forehead pressed to the wood.

"Ever since…ever since we were in school," Jimin chokes out, nearly blubbers. "Right from the start, you've been…"

"Jimin, open this fucking door right now," Taehyung spits.

"Did I ever matter to you? At all?"

It's silent before some lewd moans echo through the air, and that's how Taehyung knows Jimin's found the group chat.

"What-What are these-" Jimin gasps. "Oh my god," he cries in realization. It's a weird, broken sort of crying that never really stops. It's like he's struggling for oxygen, and it sounds terrifying through the door.

Taehyung snaps. He kicks the door, hard. He does it over and over, watching the way the wood splinters and cracks, ignoring the sounds of Jimin's petrified screams that bleed from in between each slam of his foot against his last defence.

He kicks the door till it breaks and slams open, hanging precariously off a single hinge.

Jimin's curled up on the bathroom floor, hiding in the corner. He pushes himself further into the nook as Taehyung approaches, crying so hard his chest heaves with every breath. When Taehyung gets too close, he tries to kick at him, petrified beyond belief.

"Stay away from me!" He screams, flinging a bottle of shampoo at him. It hits his shoulder. "I don't even know you! You're disgusting…"

With every hit of Jimin's feet against his shins, Taehyung's vision becomes hazier. His fists shake against his sides, itching to inflict more damage than they already have.

"You tried to record me that day like you recorded them! You've never loved me, I was just another one of them to y-you! You were trading those videos with your disgusting friends!"

Taehyung watches Jimin as he stands over him, breathing him in.

He looks pathetic.

He's lost weight. His hair is messy, and his face is a swirling tapestry of bruises and the jarring jaggedness of his stitches. He's only at half capacity with his arms, the one that's in the sling probably put there because of the way Taehyung yanked at his arm and flung him around a week ago. His eyes are dead, his face red and splotchy with sticky tears.

Defeated in every way.

“Stand up,” Taehyung commands, eerily calm.

When Jimin doesn’t listen, Taehyung surges forward and yanks him up with a rough grip on his alright arm, ignoring Jimin’s whimper and the useless attempt he makes at escaping. He leads him to the sofa.

“Sit.” He says, and this time, Jimin listens.

The other boy looks like his world has fallen apart.

“I gave every bit of myself to you…” he whispers, as if unable to believe it. “All of my firsts. I l-loved you so much that I couldn’t separate it from who I was…you didn’t want me to tell Yoongi hyung, or become public because then I’d find out about you…see you for what you are! God, I’m so stupid, I’m s-so-”

“I love you, Jimin. I loved you back then too, and I love you now.”

Jimin stares up at him for a few seconds, his mouth agape.

His vision then falls to the PS5 sitting on Taehyung’s TV unit. The console he’d worked himself to the bone to buy as a gift for Taehyung, saving money he should’ve used for himself, *needed* to use for himself. A symbol of his constant, unwavering love.

Jimin stands up, and walks over to it. He picks up the console with some difficulty, and before Taehyung realizes what he’s doing, flings it out the open window. The loud crash is audible once it hits the ground 4 floors below, probably shattered to bits.

“I hate you!” Jimin screams.

Taehyung growls, cornering Jimin against the wall once more.

“You touch anything else, or make any more of a scene, and I guarantee you you’re not going leave this apartment with a single intact bone in your body,” Taehyung spits. “Got it? Apologize for what you just did.”

When Jimin doesn’t respond, still looking at him with a hard gaze, Taehyung slaps him across the face. His head swings to the side.

“I told you to apologize.”

Jimin turns back to face him, and his eyes are dead. He isn’t crying anymore.

Taehyung snarls and yanks his face closer to him with a firm grip on his jaw.

“Apologize. You wanna get hit again?”

“I want to go home,” Jimin says then, quietly. There’s something off about the way he’s speaking.

Taehyung squeezes his cheeks together harshly.

“What the fuck are you talking about, huh?”

“Hyung…” Jimin says so quietly it’s almost inaudible, and then his face crumples around a sob. “Hyung, please save me…”

It takes Taehyung an inordinate amount of time to realize that Jimin’s referring to Yoongi, calling out for his brother in a hopeless plea.

“Stop it,” Taehyung spits, jerking Jimin’s face. “Stop fucking crying. We’re going to fix this.”

“You’ll kill me…you’re going to kill me. I’m so…tired…I just want to sleep. Maybe then this will all just be a dream, and I’ll wake up back home and not go to school so you’ll never see me and we’ll never meet. Then I’ll never have t-to go through this,” Jimin rambles.

“Shut up. Shut up!” Taehyung shouts, pinning his wrists to the wall. Jimin’s words, him saying that he wishes he’d never met Taehyung, they hurt. It’s like there’s a knife in his chest and he can’t bear it, can’t stand the way the meaning behind them sticks to every corner of his brain like napalm.

“It’s over, Taehyung. Whether you kill me like you want to or let me go, we’re broken. We always were, but now there’s nothing left to hide or protect. It’s all gone. This isn’t something we can work through. Too much has happened. We won’t ever be the same, no amount of hitting or scaring me is going to change that. It won’t make me forget, no matter how many of my bones you break.”

And those are the words that somehow speak to Taehyung, slicing through the murderous haze that plagues every inch of his mind.

The statement digs a hollow into his chest. It feels like a burrow where something that used to live now lies dead, all the happy memories that surround it decomposing along with it.

It’s over.

It’s never going to be the same again. His worst and greatest fear realized.

“Let me go…just please let me go…” Jimin whispers over and over.

Slowly, Taehyung’s arms fall limp, his fingers uncurling over Jimin’s wrists.

Jimin cries for a long time, but Taehyung doesn’t hear him. He doesn’t hear the way Jimin eventually leaves once he realizes Taehyung isn’t going to stop him, shutting the door behind him. He doesn’t hear the concerned neighbour that knocks on his door to ask about the broken console on the pavement outside, as well as all the noise.

Taehyung doesn’t know how long he stands there for, just that everything is numb.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the eighth chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 9: High As Evergreen

Chapter Notes

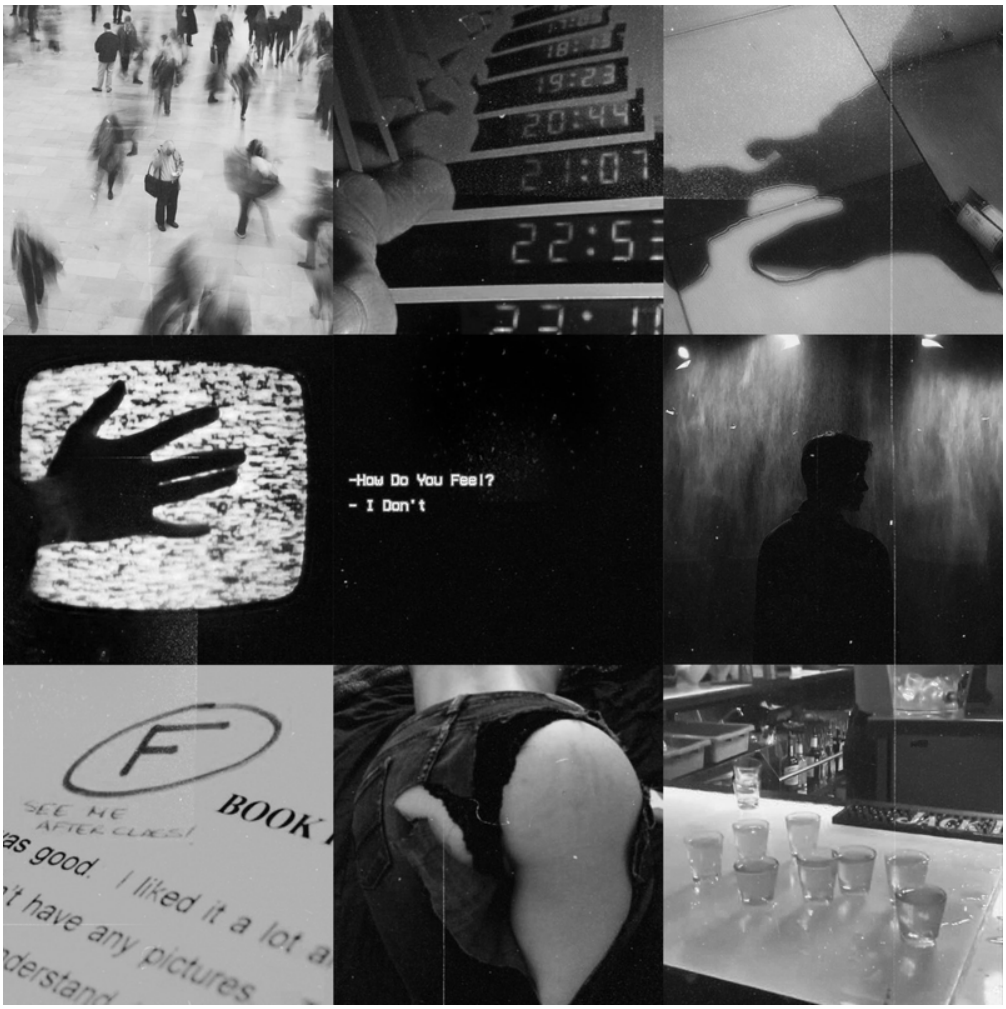
Here's the ninth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

Beautiful moodboard made by Ina (cappuccinokyu) <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes



Taehyung's life…changes.

In more ways than one.

There's a slow moving lull over everything that he used to find thrilling and exciting. The sun's always pale during the day, the nights always frigidly cold. The battering rain outside feels too loud for his eardrums. Parties start to feel drab, classes so dull they don't inspire a single thought.

Jimin is…gone.

He's completely disappeared. Like he was nothing but a mere figment of Taehyung's imagination, simply a hallucination that populated his thoughts over the last few years. His number doesn't work anymore. His social media has disappeared. The code to enter his dorm building has changed. Like he never existed in the first place. Or at least, not any longer in Taehyung's life.

It's been a few weeks now. But it feels like years.

Taehyung convinces himself that he doesn't care. That it was his fault for getting so attached. Jimin must be crying somewhere, all alone, distraught with how he made the wrong decision. That's what he tells himself, as he watches his life slowly start to fall apart, piece by piece.

Taehyung's failed his midterms.

He couldn't focus enough to study, nor muster the motivation to properly attempt the exams and practicals he did remember to sit for. He's never been an exemplary student, but his grades were always decent enough to get by without any hiccups. He's never failed an exam before, never. Not until now.

Taehyung's professors are worried. It would've been something more to be concerned about if he wasn't here based on his parents' donation to begin with. If this continues, he'll have to repeat the year. You can't scrape through medical school. And if his parents find out, it'll be even more troublesome as they'll take it as a hit to their family reputation.

It's fine, he thinks, as he looks at the glaring red results that stare back at him from his laptop screen. He'll just resit these exams along with the ones for the next semester, and that's only if he can't coax his professors into giving him an easier way to make up his grade. No biggie.

Still, there's a deep ache across his temples, spreading across his eyebrows and forging a tender path of pain around his head.

"Fuck," he says aloud, wondering he feels so drained. And hopeless, like there's nothing to look forward to. He hasn't been able to sleep well for a while now, and he's anxious, highly temperamental. He has to down around 5 sleeping pills every time he actually wants to get some rest.

It must just be the shock of it all, he supposes. The arguing, and all the noise. His online search about it said that explosive arguments could invoke minor PTSD. He does feel sorry for himself in a strange way.

Jimin never really meant that much to him, he thinks. There's no reason for him to feel so down.

Taehyung stands up, walking into his bedroom and pulling open his closet. He takes out the small stack of Jimin's clothes that he always used to keep here, for when he would stay over and head to class directly the next morning. He also grabs the few skincare products and toiletries that belong to Jimin, along with the cherry shower gel and duckling print towel in the bathroom.

He has to force himself not to press the soft fabric to his nose, breathe in Jimin's sweet natural scent that miraculously still lingers, albeit faded. It's so tempting.

Taehyung carries the pile of items downstairs, and tosses them into the garbage bin.

There's no point in keeping all of it. Weird mementos of a lacklustre phase of Taehyung's life. He should be relieved rather than…whatever it is he's feeling right now. He doesn't have the stress of having to hide things anymore, or the pressure of being a *boyfriend* breathing down his neck. He's free, just like he's always wanted, just like he's always been. Living for nothing but himself.

On his way back upstairs, he ignores the prickling at the back of his neck and the nagging voice that screams at him to go and retrieve the items.

As Taehyung walks back through his front door, there's a cold chill running up his spine. His apartment seems dark and lonely, unwelcome and uninviting. His sheets that he can see through the open bedroom doorway look wrinkled and cold, the previous quaint balcony view dull and suffocating.

He sits down at his dining table and makes himself a cup of instant ramen, all while the prickling at the back of his neck grows stronger and more scathing as torturous seconds tick by.

Taehyung's halfway through the meal when he decides he can't take it anymore, and bolts his way back downstairs. He ransacks the bins and manages to retrieve Jimin's things, an ache in his bones as he carries them back upstairs.Thankfully they were in the clean paper trash and not with the food waste. There's also an astounding sense of relief the moment he verifies that they're still there and in the same condition, a cloying and somehow disheartening sense of reunion.

He refolds Jimin's clothes as he puts them back in his wardrobe, unable to bring himself to put them in the washing. The bottle of shower gel goes back in the bathroom caddy, despite the fact that Taehyung hates fruit scented bath products. Jimin's towel is tucked away neatly on the shelf.

Later, Taehyung lies in bed. He's tired, his eyes burning with a deep ache. Yet he can't manage to fall asleep.

Everything feels…tiresome.

Even falling asleep.

A mammoth task, something that requires so much more effort than it's worth.

When the alarm rings the next morning, Taehyung feels as if he's operating on autopilot.

-

"Why can't you make eye contact with me?"

Taehyung looks at the girl below him. He's got his hands on either side of her too narrow waist, and he can feel her ribs against his thumbs just as he could with Jimin. But all it does is make him feel dull. There's no fire ignited at the reminder of her fragility, how easy it would be to shatter what's in his grasp.

Her voice is slightly nasal too.

"Do you have a cold or something?" He asks.

Her eyebrows pinch, like what he's asking is so out of left field.

"No," she still responds. "Why?"

"Your voice sounds like you do. If you don't, you probably just have an annoying voice. It's making me go soft."

Her mouth drops open. Taehyung knows he's hurt her feelings.

"I-I don't have an annoying voice. You're the only person to ever say that."

Taehyung hums. "To each their own, I suppose. I think it'll be better for the both of us if you just don't talk."

The thing is, she really doesn't have an annoying voice. But hearing her talk manages to slice through the illusion he's trying to conjure up in his mind. That the person below him has soft wide eyes and short black hair, plump lips and a slightly crooked front tooth. He doesn't like hearing a voice that isn't consistent with what he's piecing up in his head, but it's something he's never going to consciously admit.

Taehyung leans down and mouths at her neck, flinching away from her breasts. He'd somehow managed to finally find someone with a similar height and build to what he's looking for, it's so much easier now to pretend-

"Y-You don't want me to talk?" She asks, and she's sounding sadder by the minute.

Taehyung flinches at the sound of her voice yet again, pulling back sharply as the lust soaked haze in his head clears once more. It feels like being dunked into a tub of cold water, rock hard ice being pelted against your naked back.

"Are you fucking deaf?" He snaps, making a disgruntled and disgusted sound as he rolls off of her, suddenly feeling sick. He doesn't want her around anymore. "Just leave. Get out of my apartment. I'm done with you."

She seems to be taken aback for a few seconds, and Taehyung doesn't watch as she tearfully pulls her clothes back on and leaves.

"Bitch," he mutters, sitting up and flicking on the TV. The shiny new PS5 he'd bought himself stares back at him from where it sits on his unit, as if daring him to admit how it

would never match up to its predecessor. Like it wasn't bought just to fill a gaping void, a lacklustre replacement of something that held more weight than Taehyung could ever describe.

His phone vibrates, and it's a notification from a chatroom for a group assignment. Someone's tagged him in a message, frustrated at his lack of contribution and threatening to take his name off the final submission if he doesn't pull his weight. But all Taehyung can focus on is the date.

Is it already July?

It's been 3 months, since…

Funny how it feels just like yesterday.

Suddenly, Taehyung feels aged. He's now uncomfortably aware of how tense the muscles in his face are, accustomed to constant frowning and clenching. His eyes are burning, tired with lack of sleep, and his throat is heavy. His temples and the space between his eyebrows ache. And the previously calloused skin around his fingernails is tender and raw, nearly bloody with the way he's been unknowingly picking at it.

He feels lethargic. Unmotivated. Dissatisfied and understimulated.

He feels it at his core, and he doesn't know how to fix it.

-

"Hey, Taehyung-ah."

Taehyung looks up from where he's sitting by the edge of the pool, cooling down from his last lap. He finds his coach standing a few feet away, and there's a light grimace on his face.

“What’s up?” He calls absentmindedly, feeling the way his muscles burn. He’s been swimming ever since he was a child, yet it’s funny how slacking off over the past few months made such a big difference to his stamina. He’s no stranger to temporary stagnancy in performance, his confidence assures that, but he doesn’t think he’s moved backward in a long while. His body feels stiff, and he is vaguely out of breath.

“Get out of the pool, please. I want to talk to you about something.”

The words and the tone of his voice finally manage to grasp his attention. Taehyung frowns, but complies with the request. He grabs the towel he’d kept on standby and wraps it around his shoulders. It smells damp, pungent and relentless against his nose. He hasn’t let it dry properly for a while, usually just tossing the wet lump of it into the bottom of his backpack and then only taking it out when he needs to use it next. Jimin used to always be the one to remind him to take it out and put it in the washing, or he’d hang it out for Taehyung himself. Now it just sits there, in its sad, smelly self. Now wrapped around Taehyung like a pathetic cape of defeat.

He pads wetly over the tiled floor till he reaches the chair Coach has pulled up in front of him. He sits down with a heavy exhale, leaning back.

“What is it?”

“Taehyung...are you alright, son?”

Taehyung laughs in response, although it comes off strained and watery. He looks at his coach’s face, taking in his concerned expression just as a spike of anxiety makes its presence felt in his mind.

“I’m fine. Why do you ask?”

“We’ve just noticed an odd pattern of behaviour from you over the past few months. You haven’t been showing up to practice, and you don’t seem as engaged as you used to be. It’s

okay to have down time but we're just worried because none of this is consistent with the way we know you to be. I just wanted to reach out and let you know that us, the university and your team, we're always here to help if you need anything. Just shout."

Taehyung's speechless, and his blood runs cold.

"I mean, only if you want us to. There's no pressure at all. We just don't want you to feel like you're alone. Mental health is important-"

"Why do you think something's wrong?" Taehyung laughs, although it's mostly a scoff. "I'm fine, coach. I appreciate it, but there's nothing wrong. I'm better than ever."

The older man pauses before he nods with a light grimace. He doesn't seem to believe him.

"Just wanted to let you know. There's no point in suffering alone. I know you're away from your family, but you have a new one here."

Taehyung should feel touched, but instead all he feels is humiliation, dread and his usual anger. How pathetic must he seem to them? He stares back, his jaw clenched.

"And also…I think it might be a good idea for Heechul to take over your captaincy duties till you're back up to speed. Especially since we'll be entering this year's competitive season later on. The boys need to see confidence, and you could use the break. Recoup your energy in time for the big matches."

"No," Taehyung says immediately, raising his voice sharply. "I'm fine to continue."

"Taehyung-ah…" His voice is painfully sympathetic. Drenched in pity.

"I promise I'm fine. None of this will get in the way of my duties."

“Let’s take a call before the league starts, alright?”

He doesn’t give Taehyung a chance to say no this time, instead standing up and clapping a hard hand down onto his shoulder before walking away.

The moment he exits, leaving Taehyung alone in the large, cold, dark pool arena, he feels another part of him seemingly wear out. He takes in his surroundings. The cold wet tiles, the area only illuminated by the emergency exit lights and the skylight above. It’s silent save for the sound of pool filters running and the dripping of a tap somewhere in the dark locker rooms. And Taehyung’s alone, standing before the cold water.

Taehyung’s humiliated. How poorly must he have been performing for them to feel the need to talk to him? They all know he’s the detached type, it must’ve been really bad for them to finally act on any concern. It’s embarrassing. He doesn’t know why his motivation has dipped so severely.

He’s just getting lazy, he concludes. That’s what happens once you reach the top. You stagnate. Let the confidence get to your head. It’s an easy fix. All he has to do is get back to his training regimen, maintain his daily routine while still pushing himself to break and set records. It’s so easy. The pool is right in front of him. He just has to dive in once more, swim as many laps as he can till it stops feeling so alien and tiresome. Till it gets back to how it’s always been.

He’s always been the best. Always. He shouldn’t let that slip away.

But the lethargy proves to be almost fatal. Taehyung just stands by the edge of the pool, staring at the underlit water. He doesn’t care enough to get in, despite the pep talk in his head. Can’t bring himself to put in the effort and utilize the muscles in his calves to execute a simple dive. The damp smell of his thick, stale towel makes him sick. Just the thought of his body being enveloped by water, a sensation he’s loved ever since he was a child, seems unappealing in every way.

Maybe Taehyung’s just tired. He’ll work himself back up slowly. He visited the pool for the first time in nearly 3 weeks. He’s just lost touch. It’ll happen gradually, and he still has time

before the leagues begin. And he probably needed the break in the first place.

Taehyung has pushed himself enough for today.

He walks over to the dark locker room and takes a cold shower. The tiles feel hard against his bare feet. He then dries himself off with the same towel, and pulls on his clothes that feel too rough against his skin. He slings on his duffel bag, and leaves the now empty sports building, walking through the campus till he exits through the gates.

Then, it's a 7 minute walk through a few streets that are busy and thriving since it's Friday night. He can feel the bass of the music played by a few clubs thump in his heart as he makes his way past them. If he was feeling up to it, he would've just headed into one and had a fun night. He would've done it even a few months ago, he thinks.

But today, he's tired. So tired. He can't figure out why. Just did 5 laps in the pool. He's used to going over 150. He'd slept nearly 14 hours the previous night, and even took a nap in the middle of the day. He feels dreary and bleary. An all encompassing, suffocating feeling.

Taehyung looks at the time.

It's 7:40 pm.

He thinks about what Jimin would be doing right now. It's an instinctive thought process. He works at the fashion boutique 4 nights a week, Monday through Thursday. He should be there right now…

Taehyung imagines him in his cute little uniform. It's an ivory full sleeve blouse tucked into straight black trousers. He styles his hair for it too, tinting his lips as well. Jimin's the perfect fit for a job like that, looking so pretty while helping customers with his gorgeous smile and soft, soothing voice.

The boutique closes at 8:30 pm, so Jimin must be helping out the last few customers. Then he'd have to stay back for an hour to tally up everything, sort through inventory and close up. Taehyung imagines him sitting on his knees and refolding some of the expensive clothes, gazing at them longingly, wishing he could afford them for himself.

Taehyung doesn't know why, but he feels his cock stiffen up in his sweats just at the thought of Jimin working. Or doing anything at all. He feels like a depraved pervert. Still, he stands up and grabs his car keys. It's funny how all of his resolve to forget about Jimin, the part of his brain that decided that he was nothing but someone to fuck, is gone. He doesn't allow himself to dwell on it.

The drive there is silent, slow. Taehyung doesn't bother to turn on the radio, or play any music. When he reaches the store, easily recognizing the vintage storefront and glass display, he slows down. Parks on the other side of the road so he can easily peek in. The warm lighting inside is still on, extravagant chandelier glittering.

Taehyung can see a few patrons wandering around the boutique, other well dressed attendants at their tails to assist them. Jimin isn't one of them. He isn't manning the payment counter either. Maybe he's working in the back, getting a headstart on inventory.

There's some form of excited anticipation working its way up Taehyung's spine. Just at the thought of getting a glimpse of Jimin. A memory, someone Taehyung's grown out of. Just to see how miserable he is. He must've lost weight, always tended to when stressed. And Jimin was already quite frail when they parted ways. Taehyung's almost giddy.

However, the last hour before closing passes by without a single appearance of the other boy. And so does the hour after, uptil 9:30, when all the employees go home for the day. There's just one woman left who closes up, and Taehyung rolls down his window.

"Hey!"

She looks up, slightly alarmed, squinting at his vehicle across the street.

“Can I help you?” She calls back, her vision darting around as if trying to search for other people.

Taehyung doesn’t beckon her over, and she doesn’t come closer either. It’s good that she doesn’t, anyone would be stupid to approach an unknown car when there’s no one around.

“Where’s Jimin?”

“Who?”

“Park Jimin. He works here.”

She still seems confused. Taehyung swallows down his irritation.

“He’s a student at SNU. Around 5’8, pale skin, plump lips. Has a crooked tooth and big eyes, quite skinny,” Taehyung elaborates, his voice loud as it cuts through the night air, something in his bones aching as he describes him. “He works here 4 nights a week.”

Realization dawns over her face.

“Oh! I think I know who you’re talking about. He doesn’t work here anymore.”

Taehyung frowns.

“What do you mean?”

“He’d left before I joined. I was his replacement, actually. All the others talk about how they miss him all the time. He just kind of up and left from what I’ve been told. He was supposed

to train me and we were even supposed to have a farewell party…it took me a while to place the name so I didn't realize who you were talking about at first."

Taehyung's jaw clenches, eyebrows still knitted together. So Jimin left this job.

"How long ago did he leave?"

"I've been working here for about six months now."

Six months ago…that's when everything fell apart. When they ended things.

Did Jimin really just overhaul his whole life? Get rid of everything Taehyung knew about him? He might've predicted that Taehyung would come looking for him, and left so he wouldn't find him. Or maybe he really, truly, just wanted a fresh start. A new life, untainted by him.

Taehyung suddenly feels very stupid, coming all the way here. He's still in his sweats, hair messy and lips chapped. Like a desperate idiot, driving nearly 40 minutes just to get a glimpse of an old hookup. Someone who didn't matter to him.

The woman speaks once more.

"Do you need to find him? You could come back tomorrow and ask the others. I don't think he's stayed in touch but he might have-"

Taehyung drives away, his jaw clenched.

-

Taehyung's college friends drag him out to a club.

He was much too happy to go, so perhaps the word *drag* isn't right. The music feels electric, and he relishes the burn of the strong alcohol sloshing its way through his system. He can feel it break down, spreading its way all over his body and numbing the seemingly permanent hollow he feels.

They'd gone to a small pub first, this group of theirs. Taehyung can't be arsed to recall any of their names, just knows one of them from one of his classes. But they all seem to know him. Admire him. Somehow awed that he'd showed up, taken time out of his schedule of being so cool and drowning in pussy to join them on their night out.

Taehyung had knocked back shot after shot of soju, looking down at the freshman who had been plastered to his side for most of the evening. He thinks he remembers someone saying she was a family friend from back home, brought along to help make friends. She's clung to him the entire night thus far, not shy in the least about her attraction.

She's clinging to him now, too.

It's reassuring for Taehyung, feeding into his already enlarged ego. How easy it is. How easy it always is. He knows how he comes across, is fully aware of how he looks. And his reputation does precede him. Who wouldn't want to sleep with him? Popular, good at sports, supposedly good at school, rich, charming and handsome. He's also slept with enough people that it's a well known fact that he knows what he's doing, which is way more than what can be said about the rest of the boys available.

"Oppa…you should be a model," the girl slurs, her hands immediately curling around his bicep once he returns to their booth with a few drinks for the table.

"You're so strong too," she squeals as she gropes at his thick upper arm.

He doesn't acknowledge her, choosing to down his glass of whiskey straight. He feels his vision blur just that much more, his limbs now looser.

“Oppa, why’re you ignoring me…” she continues to whine.

“Yah, Iseul, give it a rest,” someone else says. “He’s not interested.”

She pouts, pulling away and sinking back into the sofa. Taehyung thinks it’s annoying. She’s obviously trying to emulate someone…Taehyung’s seen actual cute pouting before…but where has he seen it-

“Oppa, do you really not like me?”

Taehyung turns slightly, looking at her through a hooded gaze, his hair falling into his eyes. She’s short, and she’s got small hands. Taehyung likes small hands…

He splays his long fingers over her thigh, inching it up her skirt and feeling her skin.

She freezes, and her eyes are wide. She seems overwhelmed, and she squeaks as she presses her thighs shut, just when his fingertips graze the hem of her panties.

“What?” Taehyung gruffs out. “This is what you wanted, right? Been beggin’ for it all night long.”

“I-I-”

The sudden backtrack annoys him. Taehyung withdraws his hand, standing up.

“Suit yourself. Don’t know why you threw yourself at me just to be a prude when I give you what you want. Don’t waste my time.”

He doesn't stick around to hear her response, instead stumbling his way to the bar. He doesn't know how many shots he downs, and has no clue who's paying for them.

The moment his vision starts to blur, Taehyung grows on edge. He doesn't think he's ever taken it this far before. This must be the drunkest he's ever been, he's sure. Maybe a cigarette will help calm him down…

Taehyung somehow manages to make his way to the alley behind the club after a few attempts at asking the bartender how to get there. The night air is cool, and he leans against the dirty brick wall. Lighting the cigarette is easy although he does accidentally burn his fingers a little.

He takes a few drags just like that. And it does help calm him down. He no longer feels overstimulated with the music, and the crowds, and scent of sticky alcohol. Right now it's just chilly air against his skin and the rhythmic drifting of smoke through his lungs. Inside, out. Quite sobering.

Taehyung's got his head tipped back against the wall, eyes closed.

He's still too drunk to react fast enough to the footsteps he hears approaching.

Whoever it is pushes Taehyung, and he falls immediately, caught off guard. He lands with a heavy thud, and he thinks he feels some of the broken glass on the ground slice into his skin through his clothes.

His limbs are sluggish to react, his body feeling disconnected somehow. The offender crawls over him, patting at his body as if searching for something.

"Where's your fuckin' wallet…c'mon…"

Taehyung somehow manages to grasp some sense of coordination, rage quickly taking over. He swings a heavy arm at the attacker's face, punching him clean in the nose. He feels the

shockwave of it jolt up his arm, but he's quick in tackling the other man and switching their positions.

Taehyung punches him once more, smiling when he feels the bones in the other man's face give.

"You messed with the wrong dude," Taehyung laughs, standing up on shaky legs. The alcohol sloshing through his blood makes him feel superhuman. When he sees the other man try to stand up, Taehyung kicks him in the face, and then the stomach. The sight of him coughing up blood fills him with euphoria.

"Just wanted to have a smoke," Taehyung says flatly, mostly to himself. "Was tryna have a decent fucking night for once."

He looks up and sees the man trying to crawl away, dragging his body through the dirty alley.

For a second, his vision flashes back to that night in the warehouse. Jimin. He was crawling away from him the exact same way, just faster, his blood dripping like dew over the tiles. The music was thumping around them that time too. Taehyung can still hear his ragged breathing, see the washed out tone of his bare skin from the exposed lightbulb.

"Hey, now, where are *you* going?" Taehyung questions, walking over to the other man and stepping down onto the back of his left knee. The man groans in pain, although Taehyung doesn't think anyone will hear him. Not this late, definitely not where they are. He lifts his foot up and slams it down, both feeling and hearing a crack. The man lets out a blood curdling scream at the impact.

"Nnn–ghh..stop…let me go…"

"Do you think anyone would miss you if you died today?" Taehyung asks, so drunk that it's almost like someone else is speaking in his mind. "I don't think anyone would miss me if I died. I had one person, but they fucked it up by trying to run away just like you did right now. Although I suppose it was my fault for letting them get away. I'm the one stuck here looking like a fool. I'm not a fool. I'm not someone you can mess with. You got that, Jimin?"

He barely realizes the words coming out of his mouth. They just keep coming out. On and on. A grotesque spill of his most repressed thoughts.

"Jimin…you little bitch. Think you're the one who left me…I know you're crying in your room. Could never live without this dick, could you? So fucking stupid. You think I'm an idiot?"

The man on the ground is completely still, probably having now detected Taehyung's mental state, choosing to stay still out of either self preservation or his lack of ability to with his broken knee. Or probably both.

"Jimin Jimin Jimin Jimin Jimin," he says over and over, somehow fascinated with how it sounds on his tongue. "Got a pretty fucking name too. Pretty name for a pretty face. Thought you were playing me all this time, did you? With your fuckin' eyelashes and fat lips…you thought you had me. But you never meant anything to me."

"I'm not Jimin, man," the other man chokes out.

"No, you're not," Taehyung says plainly. "You're not anybody. You don't matter. So I don't really care."

"What-"

"You're just as pathetic as Jimin was that day. I still remember it so clearly. It's been more than half a year," Taehyung slurs. "Of course, you're not Jimin, you're a fat balding fuck. But just as pathetic-"

"Look man, I'm sorry about your girl, but I ain't-"

Taehyung slams his foot down into the man's lower back, snarling. He screams once more, scrabbling at the ground.

"Sorry? You're sorry for me?" Taehyung yells. "I'm not the one you should be pitying!"

"N-No, I-"

Taehyung shoves his foot against the man's face now, the dirty sole of his shoe leaving streaks of black over his bloody skin.

"Shut the fuck up. Stop fucking talking! You just keep talking…saying all this crap, and then it's my fault when I react! I'm the bad guy! You were going to take my wallet and just leave me here. Just like he did. Left me all alone. And I'm the one left looking like an idiot. It's his loss…so why does it feel so…"

The other man keeps mumbling nonsense, probably begging to be left alone, but it all sounds like warped gibberish in his ears. Taehyung's head is throbbing. His vision is swirling and spinning, the colours surging in hypnotic waves, turning negative whenever he moves his head too fast. He's too drunk, he's too fucking drunk, and there's a weird emotion that feels like it's choking him, black and heavy like soot, clogging up his lungs and arteries.

Taehyung suddenly moves both of his hands to grasp at his head, trying to quell the pounding. It doesn't work and he tips off balance, stumbling into the wall. Just as he tries to scrabble at the bricks for purchase, his fingers enclose the steely cold girth of a metal pipe that was propped upright, resting against the wall.

"Fucking bitch…good riddance…think I'm an idiot…"

Taehyung doesn't remember much beyond that. Just him lifting the heavy pipe and swinging it back down, some of the pressure in his chest releasing every time it found a home in the limp body on the ground. He finds comfort in the rhythm of it, up and down, over and over, so similar to swimming. So easy to get lost in it; let muscle memory take over.

The blood that splatters over his skin and clothes feel like a garland of victory, and he feels alive for what feels like the first time in years. The cries he hears stop after a while, just a dull wet sound permeating the air.

Taehyung drops the pipe when his arms finally grow tired, burning. He stumbles his way through the streets, feet carrying him back home. Lucky they picked a place close to home, he thinks. He walks and walks and heads upstairs once he arrives, stumbling at both the passcode points.

His clothes feel heavy and dirty, so he just climbs into the shower and turns it on. He lays down in the tub, under the spray, somehow feeling comforted by the water that envelops him.

Taehyung falls asleep that way, waking up the next morning with chattering teeth and a heavy head, the shower running the whole night and drenching his clothes. His mind is blissfully blank, and all he can think about is that he feels just a tiny bit better.

It’s an hour later, when he’s bundled up in his blanket on his couch, trying to warm his ice cold heart when the dread starts to creep its way back in. Whatever relief he felt disappears, and his stomach drops right to the ground, slow and steady. His eyes glaze out, tiredness seeping through, his stubble burning as it grows. The hollow deep within him is scathing and relentless.

He’s back to square one.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the ninth chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please

feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 10: Slow Yet Sudden

Chapter Notes

> Here's the tenth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.
>
> Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!
>
> I hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Taehyung takes off his gloves, disposing of them in the dustbin before he washes his hands. He looks up at himself in the mirror, eyes dark and dull, the surgical mask he has on covering the rest of his face. There's the palpable and pointed silence of the other students in the sterilisation and changing room, the atmosphere awkward.

They had a practical session today, and Taehyung made so many mistakes it's near laughable, and mostly worrying. It was like he had no idea how to handle a scalpel, how to suture wounds or how to monitor vitals. Basics they were taught in the first few months of their first year. His professors seemed astounded, as did his classmates.

Taehyung was curtly instructed to meet the professors alone after class.

So now, he takes off his mask, and stares at himself in the mirror. He eyes his gaunt face and his splattered scrubs, dirtied due to careless incisions and lack of forethought. He was praised in his first year for his stable hands, a vital quality for a budding surgeon, but today, all of his actions felt heavy handed and brash.

He takes off his scrubs, dumps them in the sterilisation bin, and moves to shower and change. Once he's done, all of his classmates are gone. He heads straight to the adjoined faculty room, opening the door and shutting it behind him.

His professors, the two of them who handle the practical sessions, look up immediately. Their faces don't bloom into smiles like they usually do, and Professor Hae's eyebrows are knitted together. She seems frustrated.

"Taehyung-ah," she starts. Professor Ahn clears his throat next to her.

"Yes?"

"What's going on with you?"

Taehyung stiffens. "I know I made a mistake today. I won't-"

“Doctors aren’t allowed to make mistakes, let alone surgeons. A single error could lead to a loss of a life, do you understand?” Professor Ahn, responds. “As the situation is right now, putting you in an operation theatre would be a gross failure on our part as educators.”

“You know I’m not always like this-” Taehyung attempts. “Things in my life are a little bad right now.”

“You can’t let your personal life affect your profession, especially not in medicine. Not when people rely on you, put their life in *your* hands-”

“Spare me the morality talk, will you?” Taehyung snaps, seething. “I made a mistake today. So fucking what? That doesn’t change the fact that I’m still going to be a doctor. And don’t forget that my parents’ timely donations pay for your biannual bonuses, as well as extra research budgets and equipment for your department.”

“How dare you?” Professor Ahn shouts, the vein in his forehead bulging. “Your parents’ donation also paid for your admission. Your application was considered lacklustre by our board, and it was a favour to your parents. I suppose we’re now reaping the consequences. You should be ashamed of your attitude! I’m appalled!”

Taehyung opens his mouth to shout back, but Professor Hae beats him to it.

“Either switch your programme, or retake the year. I won’t offer you any other option or leeway. You have been barely scraping by all of your courses. I cannot in good conscience pass you for this year, or hide this from the dean.”

Taehyung forces himself to calm down, his chest heaving.

“Look, I’m sorry I snapped. I shouldn’t have cursed either,” he starts, attempting some damage control. “Let’s not act rashly because of a bad day. I’ll learn not to have them in the future.”

“I won’t change my mind. You’re dismissed,” she responds curtly.

“Ma’am-”

“Leave, Taehyung.”

And Taehyung has no option but to leave. He somehow knows that protesting will result in nothing.

A whole year. He’ll have to repeat it…it’s an alien feeling. He’ll be known as the person who had to repeat a year amongst his juniors…

Taehyung thinks about it as he walks out of the medical building. He’s never been a great student, but never a poor one either. To be told that he’s failing, so badly that he can’t be entrusted with a patient, it’s humiliating in a way he can’t describe. There’s a cold, icy chill in his blood. If and when his parents hear about this, he wonders if they’ll call him-

“Oppa!”

Taehyung turns around, coming face to face with a familiar girl. He can’t quite place her though. They’re in the middle of the pathway, one that leads to the exit of their campus.

“It’s me, remember? From a couple of weeks ago…”

Taehyung can’t remember.

“I’m busy,” He says flatly before he turns back around and continues walking, not in the least bit apologetic or even curious as to who she could be.

He feels a hand tugging on his sleeve almost immediately. He turns around, eyes hard.

“It’s me, Iseul…Moonsuk’s friend? We went to that club together? We were at a pub before that too…we sat together.”

Oh. That does sound familiar. Taehyung remembers feeling annoyed. Either way, it’s easy to identify the sentiment in her eyes as she looks at him.

“Sorry for bothering you,” she continues. “I just wanted to talk about what happened that day.”

“I don’t remember anything. I was really drunk,” Taehyung responds immediately. He was really drunk. He’s still weaning off the terrible flu and cold he’d gotten after sleeping in the shower the whole night.

“Yeah. I know. You kinda snapped at me,” she accuses, her mouth curving downward.

“I probably had a reason to. If you’re expecting an apology, you’re not going to get it.”

She grabs his wrist.

“Oppa, why do you hate me so much? All everyone usually talks about is how cool you are. I just wanted to say sorry for chickening out when…y’know…”

“When what?”

“When you…touched me. I w-was just surprised-”

Taehyung doesn't respond. His face is gaunt, dark circles harsh and prominent, yet it must do nothing to make him less handsome in that moment because she stares up at him with hearts in her eyes.

"Okay," Taehyung responds plainly. "Apology accepted. I guess."

Her round face breaks out into a wide, toothy smile. She brings a hand up to push some of her hair behind her ear, and Taehyung's eyes are suddenly drawn to her chubby fingers, short and stubby. Small hands…he's remembering more now.

"Do you study here or something?" He asks then, voice gruff.

"O-Oh! Yeah, I'm a freshman…I said I was Moonsuk's friend, remember? We were neighbours back home."

Taehyung stares, his face still blank, expression hard. It's one of the merits of having sharply angular features. Even in his natural state, Taehyung seems…unapproachable. Unpleasant. Brooding. The only thing that softens his appearance are his long eyelashes.

"Do you want to go out for dinner sometime? I—" She starts.

"No. I don't do dates or relationships."

"Oh," she says then, deflating. "My friends did tell me something similar that night… speaking of which, did you know that the club's closed? We were all kicked out by the cops because somebody died right outside—"

"Do you want to fuck or not?" Taehyung asks, expression still neutral.

She shuts up then, eyes owlish wide, and her face somehow grows even redder.

Taehyung clenches his jaw, quirking up an eyebrow.

A few seconds later, she nods shakily.

“Cool. Follow me.”

It’s a boring walk home. The girl chatters away as she walks next to him, her hands fixed by her sides. She’d tried to wind them around his arm like she’d done that night, but one pointed look from Taehyung seemed to be enough for her to understand that it wasn’t the best decision.

He’s silent as he opens his front door, her sweet humming behind him grating his ears.

“Wow, oppa! You have such a nice place! This is so much better than my dorm—”

She’s cut off when Taehyung kisses her roughly, pushing her against the wall of his foyer. She jerks with surprise, her fingers curling into his t-shirt. He doesn’t let her breathe for even a second, focusing all of his attention on the moment, willing himself to fall into it.

He’s waiting for it, searching for it relentlessly. The spark in his veins, or a hint of arousal. Just a dollop of fuel to ignite the weakened flame in his gut, willing. It’s been growing smaller and smaller as the months go by.

Right now, as he does everything he usually has in the past, Taehyung feels nothing. Even though she’s his type - small, big eyes, some sort of naivete to her personality.

His cock is soft in his briefs, uninterested in every way.

“Oppa,” she gasps. “Let’s go to your bedroom.”

Taehyung keeps the foreplay going. Is relentless at it, almost desperate. Kisses her till his lips start to ache, grinding and groping and feeling. Tears at her clothes, manhandles and pushes and does everything that should work. He grows more frustrated with every second that passes.

And yet, when she reaches down to feel him, all she makes contact with is the soft fabric of his sweats and his somehow even softer cock.

She makes a confused noise.

“Are you not in the mood or something?” She asks as she pulls away, and it’s not mocking, just surprised. Taehyung’s anger flares almost immediately. “It’s okay if you’re not feeling up to it right now-”

“It’s not that I’m not in the mood, it’s just that you’re fucking ugly.”

The words just fly out, scathing.

She seems stunned for a few seconds.

And then, the tears well up.

“W-What?” She whispers.

“You’re not attractive enough to get me hard,” he spits, knowing he’s damaging her self esteem in an irreparable way. “That’s why I didn’t want to fuck you that night too. I just brought you here because I knew you wouldn’t leave me alone…heh…even your slutty behaviour isn’t enough to turn me on.”

Deep inside, he's desperate. To justify why his usually rampant libido is seemingly non-existent. To avoid having to confront the fact that it's been dying for a while, that sex lately has become boring and uninspiring.

"You're lying. I know I'm pretty," she refutes even though her voice quivers.

"Is that so? Did your daddy tell you that growing up? Maybe in your small town you were… but not here," he mocks, knowing he's lying because she's actually very pretty. It just serves to agitate him further. She's objectively attractive, much better than a lot of his lays…so why isn't he…

He isn't prepared for the way she slaps him across the face.

"You're an asshole!" She sobs, yanking her dress back on and running out of the room. Moments later, his front door slams open and shut. Taehyung's too stunned to stop her.

All he can focus on is his limp cock.

Taehyung sits there for a while. Eventually, he reaches for his phone. He scrolls relentlessly through all of the porn online he can find, desperate as he makes his way through a million different genres. He watches it all greedily, even going through his usual favourites.

The hours pass, his brain rotting.

And his cock is still soft.

Not so much as a twitch. Not a single iota of arousal.

Taehyung then opens his photo gallery, going through all the videos he has of him fucking other people. Files that used to invoke an unparalleled thrill, knowing that they're all genuine, people so desperate just for him.

Nothing.

Just nothing.

He doesn't know how he makes the decision. Maybe he's too crazy with fear and despair to process any of it, or to stop his fingers from flying across the screen of his phone. He types in the password to a special locked folder, opening it up and coming across hundreds of videos and images that set his nerves ablaze.

The moment Jimin's moans and the sounds of skin slapping echo through the empty space of the room, Taehyung's cock starts to thicken up.

It's almost a miracle, the way the goosebumps spread across his skin, hairs on the back of his neck standing up. Taehyung watches greedily as the Jimin on his phone has his legs spread, dainty ankles perched on Taehyung's shoulders.

This was the first time they had sex, in Jimin's room. Jimin's first time ever.

They both look so young. His vision is glued to Jimin's face, drinking in the way his eyes are glazed out, rolling into the back of his head whenever Taehyung rams into him too hard. He was never gentle. Jimin's soft hair fanned out over the pillow, the warm blush on his cheeks, pretty collarbones and wrists and ankles. The way he jerks up the bed with each thrust, his back arching all graceful and desperate. Taehyung can feel his own desperation through the video, the urged way he plunges his cock into Jimin's hole, pace fast and hard and relentless. He can see it in the way his spine is straight, muscles flexed and jaw clenched.

It almost feels like whiplash, seeing Jimin's pretty face after so long. The uncanny reunion sets him ablaze. He feels…revitalized. Like maybe he isn't broken, like he's back to his true and usual self. Like nothing's changed. Nothing at all.

Jimin, his sweetest antidote and most potent poison all at once.

Taehyung looks downward, half caught between the present and a rediscovered past.

He's tenting his pants. And when he pulls the waistband low enough, his cock slaps up against his belly, hard and pulsing and a furious red. The fire's raging in his gut, where it was previously cold and damp.

When he wraps a hand around his cock, he hisses, almost seeing stars with how good it feels. A dollop of precum oozes out, dribbling its way down the thick length. He slowly starts to jerk himself, matching his own pace from back then.

Taehyung doesn't last long.

He cums in sync with himself in the video, imagining that he's releasing deep inside Jimin's tight heat when in reality it's just his calloused fist. It's the best orgasm he's had in a very very long time, spreading down to every inch of his body. His ears greedily latch on to Jimin's peaking breaths, the way he disappears underneath his body when Taehyung blankets him in a hug.

He watches the whole thing, even the minutes after when Jimin falls asleep, and Taehyung walks over to the camera to stop the recording, a smug smirk on his face.

When the Taehyung in the present recovers, his cum dribbling down his knuckles and over his abs, he feels both terrified and satisfied at the same time.

There's a revelation brimming somewhere in his mind. A truth he needs to confront.

Taehyung doesn't let it surface. He's not ready. He's not broken. This doesn't mean anything.

“She was just ugly,” he says aloud. Her and all the girls he’s slept with over the past few months. He’d always managed to finish before today, but it did get progressively more difficult each time.

He’s just getting bored.

Taehyung doesn’t have the capacity to introspect much more. Not right now.

He’s finally found an escape, which also doubles as an entrance to a deeper labyrinth of his mind that he might never be able to pull himself out from.

-

Taehyung’s birthday swings around.

Every year since he turned 15, he’d bring it in at a party the previous night. A true, big, pompous and nearly grotesque celebration. When his parents still cared, they’d rent out the clubhouse of the golf resort his dad frequents. There’d be a massive cake inspired by his hyper fixation of the year, and lots of burgers. Taehyung loved burgers, still does in fact. After a certain point, a hidden line which Taehyung crossed when he turned 15, he’d organize his birthdays himself.

He still remembers his first time breaking into the stash of alcohol at home. Rare spirits and fine wines, painstakingly curated and ripening in their expensive cabinet. When Taehyung turned 15, he’d downed the whole bottle of special Japanese whiskey his father treasured. He’d drained the bottle and somehow pushed through the burning of his throat as the amber liquid scorched the ecosystem of his body. Poisoning him.

Of course, he’d spluttered and a lot of it spilled out of his mouth. But sitting there, leaning against the barren wall next to the bar table in his empty, dark, staggeringly large house, Taehyung finally grew up. Entered the throes of adulthood as he drowned himself in solitude and a newfound obsession with the way alcohol blurred his world around the edges.

Made life, if only for that moment, feel delectable.

It was heavenly.

His body grew stronger, the world turned slower. He could swing his arms this way and that yet the movement would stretch out for what felt like hours, every tendon in his body committed to a slow dance. He felt invincible. He wasn't a child anymore.

Taehyung chased that feeling.

The next day, Taehyung had convinced one of his classmates to come home with him. It was easy to fuck her. He doesn't quite remember what she looked like, not anymore. He felt tall, and powerful. He'd bring a girl home every day. Like a little checklist. He was caught by his dad once when he'd brought someone into the little research library they have on the second floor, school uniform trousers tangled around his ankles, a pair of dainty bare legs on either side of his waist and his back bathed in sweat. His father left promptly and they never spoke of it, but Taehyung found a box of condoms left on the study desk in his room the next day.

He was obsessed with it; the way they'd all look at him. The thrill in their eyes at being invited to *Kim Taehyung's house*, the fanciest one in the fanciest lane of the fanciest neighbourhood, time alone spent with the most popular boy of their grade. The way they'd let him splay their legs open and slot himself in between, give him everything he wanted and more. Knocking off their virginities one by one.

High School was a new playing field when he'd joined the next year.

Every birthday was a rave. Either a party at his house or a rented out mansion in the outskirts, drinks free flowing and the music loud. He'd barely remember a fraction of it by the next morning, and sex became something he'd indulge in as often as he inhaled oxygen.

The first time Taehyung consciously chose to be present during sex, both in the sense of being sober and just savouring the moment, it was with Jimin.

Mostly because he *wanted* to remember every bit of it, for the very first time. It held value. The excitement was palpable on his tongue. He'd been giddy just at the thought of it, right when they first met. Simply looking at him made his gut pulse with hunger, his whole body inclined to him. That, coupled with the apprehension of sleeping with someone of the same sex made him hesitant to approach it with the same detached mindset.

Jimin was special to him. He'd always heard people talk about how sex only gets better when it's with someone you care about, and he'd always laugh. But with Jimin, he found that it came true.

He craved him, every minute of every day.

Whenever Taehyung would unbutton Jimin's clothes, he'd be beside himself with excitement to feel his bare skin. Always so soft and pliable, easy to colour. He liked dancing his fingers over his body to find the spots that would make his breath hitch, make his pretty lips that haunt Taehyung's dreams drop open. Whenever he'd spread him open, perverted eyes drawn to his rosy pink core, his cock would ache with how hard and heavy it was, pulsatingly hot in a way it never was otherwise. Desperate to be engulfed in his dizzying, honeyed heat. It all felt new, and it ate into his jaded and monotonous lifestyle. And it kept feeling new, and exciting. The light never dimmed. An unquenchable thirst.

And even though all Taehyung has left now are Jimin's videos, it has the same effect.

Today is Taehyung's birthday.

He'd gone to a club with some of his swim team and classmates, and they'd gotten drunk and danced for most of the night. He lost track of the people approaching him, attempting to lure him into a hookup. He kept brushing them off, not interested. And even if he was, it's almost like his arousal is hot wired to Jimin. He's lost all interest in everything and everyone else. He's accepted it too, in a sad, desperate, cowardly way. A revelation that he's acknowledged at the surface, with no intention of delving deep into it and discovering its true meaning.

Taehyung leaves in the middle of the party, bored. When he enters his apartment, stinking of alcohol, his head spinning with it, the first thing he does is shuck off his jeans.

He stumbles his way to his bed, fingers rushing to open up his phone and unlock Jimin's folder. His other hand curls around his stirring cock as he settles into the sheets.

Taehyung's so thrilled, so excited that it should be worrying.

It takes him a few minutes to correctly input the password, and the first thing he does is disable it. It's not like he doesn't visit this folder several times a day.

Then, he randomly selects a video of them having sex, his eyes trained on Jimin's face as his cock hardens like steel. He starts to stroke himself, slowly at first because he doesn't want to rush this. He imagines his cock sinking into the other boy's small mouth, or his ass, or between his short fingers. Video after video of pure bliss. Taehyung's favourite little pornstar.

"Fuck, Jimin…"

He doesn't remember much of that, lost in the memory blaring its way from his phone through his brain, all up until he reaches his peak. He's sweating, and his fist is sore, fingers squeezing around his spent cock. There's elation in his mind, and he's finally happy and it all finally feels like a birthday should.

He falls asleep just like that, cum drying over his hand, a dazed smile on his face.

-

"Damn bro, you really need to clean this place up."

Taehyung looks up at Hyungsoo as the other man grimaces, looking around his apartment. His old school friend called and asked to come over, and Taehyung said yes. It feels like almost centuries since they'd last hung out. It's the day after his rather eventful yet dreary birthday.

“My maid’s on leave,” Taehyung responds brusquely, sinking into his couch. “She’ll be back next week.”

Hyungsoo sits down next to him, scrunching up his nose. “I think some of your food’s gone bad.”

Taehyung shrugs. The other boy continues to speak.

“I don’t remember you ever being a slob. You doin’ okay? It’s been a really long time since we last-”

“I’m fine, dude. Just going through a rough patch with school and everything. If you hate the smell so much, you can leave. I don’t even smell anything,” Taehyung responds shortly. Deep inside, he reminds himself to be patient. His highschool friends know him as someone easygoing. The furthest from temperamental. He can’t slip up.

“Sorry, dude. I didn’t mean to upset you, I was just surprised.”

“Yeah, I know,” Taehyung sighs. “How’s your girl?”

“Oh, we broke up. She dumped me last week.”

Taehyung looks at him, quirking up an eyebrow. “What happened?”

“She found out about the other girls,” Hyungsoo scoffs. “I’m doing fine, if I’m being honest. It’s kinda her loss. It’s natural that people make mistakes. I just hated being made to feel like the villain. You know what, Tae? I think you’re on the right track. You always were. Relationships just aren’t any good.”

“Yeah,” Taehyung laughs, although he isn’t quite sure if he agrees. Not anymore.

“Like, what’s the point of spending so much money and time taking these girls out when they’ll just leave at the end of the day? You can’t expect a man to stay content with one woman. Sometimes I feel like we’re punished for being who we are.”

“Do you think love is real?” Taehyung asks Hyungsoo.

The other man frowns at the question, but answers anyway.

“Yeah, but it sucks. I mean, I really did love her-”

“No. Not like that. Do you think the kind of love where you’re just happy with that one person exists?” Taehyung clarifies. “The kind of love where it’s enough.”

“No, I don’t. Taehyung, you’ve kinda changed.”

“Haven’t changed,” Taehyung mutters. “Just thinking more. I don’t believe in it either, but it’s just interesting to think about it.”

“Fuck, you’re right. All that sappy shit.” Hyungsoo agrees. “I think it might be real for my parents.”

“Not mine,” Taehyung responds plainly.

It’s silent then for a little while. It’s a dull evening.

“You want a beer?” Taehyung asks, desperate to fill the silence before he snaps and asks Hyungsoo to get out.

“Sure. I’m hungry too, can we order something?”

“Cool.”

Taehyung walks over to the fridge, opening it and finding it completely empty. He sighs. The convenience store near his house has been shut for a few days now for renovation. The next one is a fifteen minute walk away.

“Soo, I’m out of beer,” he announces once he’s back in the living room. “I’m gonna head out and get some.”

“Okay, but what about the food?”

“You can order some. I’ll be back in around 20,” Taehyung answers, slipping into his jacket and heading toward the entryway.

“Bro…just gimme your phone. You have the address saved and everything.”

“Use your own phone.”

“Mine’s kinda beat right now,” Hyungsoo responds, holding up his device. The screen is cracked and when he turns it on, you can see that only half the LED display is working. “Dropped it while I was biking.”

Taehyung’s eyebrows knit together.

Hyungsoo raises an expectant eyebrow at him. He then groans when he’s met with silence.

“C’mon, Tae, I’m starving! The fuck do you think I’m gonna do with your phone? You’ve got passwords on your bank apps and stuff, right?”

Taehyung considers this. He does have passwords for everything that’s important. His image gallery is open but it’s nothing that Hyungsoo hasn’t seen before. And the only important folder in there is always locked…

“Fine. But no funny shit,” Taehyung relents, tossing Hyungsoo his phone once he unlocks it.

“I’m gonna get us something with lots of cheese and grease,” Hyungsoo says, grinning as he catches the device.

Taehyung rolls his eyes, shucking on his shoes and leaving.

In the elevator ride down, his eyes stay trained onto the corner of the little space. He made out with Jimin there, a few times. In the little corner which was the blindspot for the security camera. Since then, the elevator car’s been painted a new colour and a mirror’s been put in. Almost like he and Jimin were never ever here.

Taehyung makes his way toward the convenience store in a half jog. The movement helps heat up his body too, and he’s also glad because it makes the trip shorter. It’s been snowing for a while now.

Once he reaches the store, the sight of it almost like an oasis in a scorching desert, Taehyung buys 3 six-packs of beer. Some ramen, a few instant rice tubs and some pocky too. He makes sure he has a firm grip on the shopping bags before he leaves.

The trip back is slower, and when he enters his building, Taehyung realizes he’s been gone for 30 minutes. He’s hungry too. He hopes the food’s been ordered already.

The moment he gets the door open, he sees Hyungsoo seated on his couch.

The other man's eyes are trained on something playing on his phone, and they're wide and glazed out, almost as large as dinner plates. There's a prominent bulge at the crotch of his jeans.

And then Taehyung hears it, words tinny through his phone speaker.

"T-Tae…what are you doing? Why are you recording?"

"Keep going, baby. Don't worry about it."

"Please s-stop it, don't record me please-"

Hyungsoo looks up at Taehyung.

"Dude.." he drawls out, almost in disbelief. "You were fucking Yoongi's little brother?"

Taehyung's frozen, fingers white where they grip the plastic carrier.

"You took so long, I was getting bored. I thought I'd go through your library to see all the new pussy you've been getting…but instead I find you balls deep in our favourite fairy faggot…this is fucking crazy. There's like a million videos here of you guys. You know Yoongi would fucking murder you, right?"

It was locked.

It was locked.

It was supposed to be locked.

"The worst part is…heh," Hyungsoo continues, laughing. "I was kinda disgusted at first but now…I do admit that I kinda get it. He was always strangely too pretty for a boy. And from what I can see, he takes it better than a girl." He tilts the phone toward Taehyung, and he can see Jimin on the screen. All teary eyed and distraught in his cute bra, lips swollen from sucking cock. "I think if I was in your position, I would've bust my load all over his face the moment he started to cry. He's such a pretty crier. I don't know how you held back. It was so fucking hot, I've been playing this part over and over…god, he's such a fucking slut-"

Things happen extremely fast after that. He barely registers the way he lunges across the room and grabs Hyungsoo by his hair, smashing his head into the glass coffee table in front of him. He does it over and over. The sounds are loud and quickly grow wet, and Hyungsoo attempts to fight back, his face bloody and nearly caved in.

Taehyung's vision is white, his ears ringing.

"F-Fuck, fucking stop it—" Hyungsoo shouts, cut off as Taehyung slams his face into the table once more, this time hard enough to shatter the glass. The two of them tip forward with the loss of support, and Hyungsoo attempts to kick him as the two of them land on the floor. He dodges.

Taehyung grabs his knee and pushes his calf upward in a rapid and hard motion, breaking the bone as easily as a twig. Hyungsoo screams bloody murder.

"Stop it, Tae, what the fuck, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, FUCK!" He shouts although the latter half of it melts into a pained sob.

Taehyung then repeats the same thing with the other leg, snapping his bone. He knows exactly what to do to deal the most damage. Hyungsoo screams.

There's some rapid knocking on the front door. Taehyung snaps out of it.

“Hey, is everything alright in there?”

It’s his neighbour.

Taehyung covers Hyungsoo’s mouth the moment the other man tries to scream.

“Shut the fuck up,” Taehyung spits. “If you scream, I’m going to fucking kill you. I mean it.”

When Hyungsoo doesn’t respond, Taehyung punches him across the face.

“Got it?”

“Hello, can you hear me? Taehyung-ah? Do you need any help?” His neighbour continues to knock.

Hyungsoo nods, sobbing. Taehyung rips a big chunk of shirt off, stuffing the fabric into his mouth before he moves one of the table legs over his hand to keep him from moving. He turns on the TV, puts the volume on high and heads toward the door, opening it just a crack.

“Hey, Dongman hyung,” Taehyung greets, putting on a smile. “Sorry about that. I was just watching a movie.”

The older man frowns. He’s got garbage bags in his hand, clearly on the way to dispose of them downstairs.

“You’re okay, right?” He asks, peering at him and then tilting his head toward the rest of his apartment. The noise from the TV covers up the sounds of Hyungsoo screaming through the makeshift gag.

“Yeah, I just had a rough day. I’ve got a new speaker system here and I guess I didn’t realize how loud it was. Sorry about that. I’ll make sure to keep it down.”

“No no, that’s not a problem,” Dongman responds. “As long as you’re fine. I thought you were getting hurt in there.”

“Haha, I promise everything’s alright. Have a nice day!”

He shuts the door then, waiting till he hears disappearing footsteps. Then, he turns around to look at Hyungsoo. It’s a mess. There’s blood all over the floor, and the broken glass glitters and reflects the fast changing lights of the TV.

Taehyung walks over to him, noticing the way Hyungsoo flinches away with fright, trying to scrabble back and crying out when his free hand sinks into the shards of glass on the floor. The other one remains trapped under the leg of the table.

Taehyung squats next to him.

“You shouldn’t have gone through my phone,” he says, blank and matter of fact. “And you shouldn’t have helped yourself to something that doesn’t belong to you. Jimin is mine. You don’t get to imagine what it would be like to fuck him, or make him cry, or cum all over his face. I’d fucking castrate you and make you choke on your balls before your stupid brain could even complete the thought.”

When Hyungsoo doesn’t respond, mostly because he can’t, Taehyung shuffles forward and yanks the cloth out of his mouth.

“You’re lucky my neighbour knocked,” Taehyung laughs. “I can’t guarantee you would still be breathing if he didn’t.”

“T-Tae, c’mon, we’re friends-“ he splutters, nearly choking on his own blood.

“I don’t give a shit about you. You’re nothing to me,” Taehyung responds easily. “You’re going to forget you ever saw those videos. You’re not going to think about Jimin. If that seems like a difficult task for you, I don’t mind putting your brain through more permanent damage than I probably already have. And if I find out that you’re running your mouth, I’ll just kill you. I’ll do it. Don’t think I won’t, you know I will. There’s no one that can protect you from me.”

It’s true. He can’t go to the police, not when he’s already tied to hundreds of explicit videos filmed without consent. The problem would be larger than they could handle.

The other option is so easy.

“What is Jimin to you?” Taehyung tests.

“N-Nothing, I don’t know him. I don’t know w-who he is.”

Taehyung smiles.

“Okay.”

“A-Are you going to kill me?”

“If I wanted to, you’d already be dead. Just get the fuck out of my apartment.”

Hyungsoo tries to move once Taehyung lifts the table keeping him down. A quick attempt at standing has him falling over onto his stomach as he yelps in pain. He scrabbles at the glass riddled floor, groaning with a rough voice.

“Tae, I c-can’t walk. I can’t.”

“Why not?” Taehyung asks lazily.

“My knees…you broke them,” Hyungsoo answers stupidly, still crying. “You g-gotta help me. C’mon, man. I won’t tell anyone..you gotta help me…you gotta take me home…” he begs.

Taehyung rolls his eyes. He rummages through Hyungsoo’s pockets, finding his wallet. He takes out all of the cash and counts it.

“You have enough money here to rent a wheelchair from the pharmacy down the road,” Taehyung observes aloud. “I could call you a taxi. But we can’t do that, because they’d take a look at your ugly face and ask you who did it. Maybe I *should* just kill you.”

“No! No no no, please-”

“I’m kidding, jeez,” Taehyung laughs once more.

He puts a face mask and shades on Hyungsoo’s face as well as a beanie, and throws him over his shoulder. Taehyung carries him downstairs, the rest of his body wrapped in a thick coat, and tosses him in the backseat of his vehicle. Hyungsoo reluctantly gives him the directions although he’s barely understandable with his groans, and Taehyung carries him upstairs too. Somehow, in a weird twist of luck, they don’t run into anyone both ways.

The moment Taehyung gets the door to Hyungsoo’s brand new apartment open, he tosses him onto the floor in the little foyer. The other man cries out in pain, scrabbling over the tiles.

“It’s good that you’re not living with your family anymore. It would’ve made this a lot more difficult. I never did give you a housewarming gift, did I?”

Hyungsoo just cries.

“Although I do suggest you move back in with them. Might be hard to run errands and look after yourself with 2 useless legs.”

“T-Tae, please-”

“Next time, I’ll kill you,” is all Taehyung says before he leaves, shutting the door behind him. On the way back down, he hums.

Hyungsoo actually considered sleeping with Jimin. Was turned on at the sight of him crying. Someone as boring, uninteresting and uninspiring as Hyungsoo thought he might’ve been deserving of even setting his eyes on Jimin.

Taehyung thinks he did a good job. Hyungsoo would’ve told Yoongi if he didn’t frighten the wits out of him. And he was also deserving of the punishment. For rising above his station, even considering that he might be entitled to what’s Taehyung’s. Even now, even after they’re over, Taehyung cannot share. Hyungsoo has a broken leg, nose, and plenty of scars to serve as a constant reminder.

Taehyung has often wondered how Yoongi and Jimin are brothers. They’re so different. Where Yoongi is mature and perceptive, Jimin is immensely naive and near childish. They don’t look much alike either, beyond their shared pale skin tone and slim build. Yoongi’s voice is staggeringly deep while Jimin’s is high, his hands large where Jimin’s are dismally tiny. Yoongi is tough where Jimin is easily moved to tears. Yet they both love ferociously, with everything they’ve got. Something that could be seen in their bond, and in the way Jimin loved Taehyung.

If he was being honest, Taehyung expected Yoongi to break down his door the same night he’d hit Jimin. He expected it in the days after too, so sure that Jimin would’ve rung his precious hyung to tell on him, or Yoongi would’ve pried it out of his baby brother what with their near constant video calls.

But Yoongi never came.

Which means that Jimin just didn't tell him. There's no way Yoongi wouldn't have done something if he knew.

And to Taehyung, that means that Jimin cares about him enough to want to protect him.

A small glimmer of hope that finally lets him sleep.

-

SNU's pool is the same as he remembers.

Still staggeringly large, and well maintained. The locker rooms are pristine, showers stocked with expensive shampoos and body washes. Even little bottles of conditioner, and heavy super soak bath towels.

Taehyung's teammates are eyeing him warily.

He's not prepared. They all know it. He too knows this, but he also believes that he can do it. He did it last tournament. But that time, he'd actually trained for hours and followed a special regimen. Taehyung's lost weight, he's leaner now. He'd tried to scrunge together a routine and practice in the past week.

Coach still thinks he might win, which is why he's been approved to participate in the first place. He's the only one to ever win against SNU's impressive swim team, so it naturally made sense to place your bets on someone you know could succeed.

Still, Taehyung's mind is drifting, even as it's time for the race to start.

Would Jimin come this time? To see him?

Three days ago, it was officially a year since Jimin left him.

365 days of radio silence. A total amputation, clean slated.

This past year hasn't been the smoothest for Taehyung, but he knows that Jimin would've definitely had it rougher. He must've lost weight, always tended to eat less when upset. He must be crying himself to sleep every night, wishing he didn't make the wrong decision and leave the only good thing he had. A gaping hole clawed in his heart, torn open and bleeding.

Taehyung's too busy scanning the audience for Jimin that he misses the moment the race starts.

He's already lost a critical advantage. He flings himself into the pool, trying to swim as fast as he can and ignoring the stiffness of his muscles as he does. Somehow, his intakes of breath don't seem as effective as they used to be. Still, he keeps going, confident despite a smidge of doubt and apprehension taking form in his mind.

Taehyung keeps swimming, until he makes the final lap and hauls himself out of the pool.

Only to find all the other swimmers already out. His name's at the bottom of the leaderboard.

Taehyung's heart drops, his stomach twisting.

He's never lost before.

The cheers from the SNU students for their star player are deafening. All he can focus on are the dejected and somehow knowing stares from his teammates and Coach. Like they'd expected this, but are still staggeringly disappointed.

He's immediately benched for the rest of the matches, the juniors taking over. They don't do too shabby a job, but it's pretty much consistent with KU's average performance before

Taehyung joined the team. It doesn't help. Their final score is lower than it's ever been because of his major fuck up.

It's when they're in the locker rooms after the meet ends that their coach starts yelling.

"I told you! I told you to take a back seat, that you weren't ready for this tournament!" He shouts, the veins on the side of his head bulging. Their coach isn't hot headed, so his outburst is jarring to say the least. The silence of the rest of the swimmers is palpable.

"You never showed up to training! Fuckin' up your lungs with all that smoking! It's no wonder you couldn't take your breaths right! And missing the start, where the fuck was your head at?" His voice bellows through the locker room, reverberating through his chest.

Taehyung keeps his head hung low, knowing that he does deserve this.

"I'm sorry, coach. I don't know what happened."

"If you knew you weren't going to win, why didn't you say something?"

"I didn't know-"

"This loss is going to mean a dent in our funding. Which means less training and less supplies, something that affects everyone in this room. You weren't ready, and you just didn't care."

"I'll make it up," Taehyung responds, looking up. "I'll do better next-"

"There is no next time. You're no longer captain. I won't kick you off the team for the sole reason that this sport is a key part of the basis for your admission. Expect to be benched for every single meet."

It’s like ice, what’s flowing through his veins. He’s never ever been reprimanded for his performance before, and has always been at the top. He doesn’t have much time to react though as the others start to file out and leave the moment their coach stops speaking.

Taehyung’s left alone, in the empty locker room. He can still hear the cheers of the students outside.

What happened to him?

He was never like this. It’s an all encompassing, panic inducing sentiment, what’s wracking its way through his system. Failure was a concept unknown to him. He’s never been so unmotivated. He’s never lost.

When he leans down to hold his head in his hands, his fingers graze over his stubble that’s grown over the past few days. He lacked the will to shave. His hair is shaggy and knotted against his touch, dark circles under his eyes prominent.

He’s no longer at the top. Toppled off his pedestal.

“Fuck,” he says aloud, his voice rough. He’s having a crisis.

“Hyung?”

Taehyung looks up to see one of the juniors peeking his head in, looking a little apologetic.

“I’m sorry to bother you, they just asked me to come get you since the bus back is leaving…”

“I’m not coming. I’ll go back on my own.”

The other boy pauses before he nods, grimacing slightly as he shuts the door and leaves.

Taehyung sits there for a while. Then takes his shower although there's no hot water, just scrubs at his scalp and digs the heels of his palms into his eyes. They burn.

When did things start to go wrong?

His mind flashes back to that fateful day a year ago. When he'd had Jimin pressed up against the wall of his apartment, the other boy crying about how he wished he never met Taehyung. When he'd walked out of Taehyung's life, apparently having taken his will to do anything with him.

Jimin was just a hookup…someone who Taehyung used. So why…

Taehyung's dazed as he leaves the locker room once he dresses into his clothes, although his t-shirt's on backwards. By now, it's evening. Classes are over. SNU's campus is bustling with students either out for the night or on their way back to their dorms to study and pore over their extensive syllabus.

Taehyung didn't bring his car, so he'll have to take a taxi home, he supposes.

He walks around, absentminded, towering over most of the students hurtling past him on the cobblestone pathways. The fresh air does feel nice against his skin, and he's in no real hurry to make it back to his apartment.

Taehyung feels…so lonely.

And there's still a nagging part of his brain, loud and garish, that wonders why Jimin didn't come to see him swim. Despite it all.

Maybe he'll just head home now. Pick up some nice food and a few beers, and go home and watch something. Maybe open up that folder too. He smiles at the thought, a little more energy in his steps as he moves toward the exit.

He books a cab once he's out, shifting on his feet where he stands on the sidewalk. It's 5 minutes away. Even the pavement looks dull. The 5 minutes stretch on for what feels like a century.

"Ahh! Jungkookie, you scared me!"

Taehyung's spine seizes up as his ears catch the voice, ever so distant as it carries over to where he stands. His heartbeat's in his ears, thundering, the hairs on the back of his neck stiff with attention.

Suddenly, he feels alive. The weird, bogtrodden part of him shrivels up to nothing.

He turns to his side, his stomach twisting and turning.

Just across the street, by a bus stop, is Jimin.

He's wearing a pink turtleneck. Even from where Taehyung's standing, he can see the glitter on Jimin's eyelids and the peachy tint of his lips. And his hair's dyed a pale tone of lilac that almost looks blonde. He's smiling widely, cheeks bunched up and rosy. Taehyung's heart stops.

And there's someone pressed to his back.

There's a sudden bitter taste on the back of Taehyung's tongue, coating his senses like poison.

It's a tall boy, around Taehyung's height, quite built. He'd evidently come up behind Jimin and startled him, as can be seen by his toothy grin. He's got his arms wrapped around Jimin's

waist from behind, and noses at his jaw, lips meeting Jimin's in a sweet yet fleeting kiss once the other boy turns to look at him. When they pull away, the stars are visible in *Jungkook's* large eyes, all focused on the boy in his arms.

No one seems to bat an eye at the public display of affection.

Taehyung's arms drop where they were clasping the straps of his backpack. His eyes are wide, and he's pretty sure his mouth has dropped open. There's a sharp pain in his chest, twinging and vicious. The back of his neck feels clammy.

Suddenly, a bus arrives, rolling into the stop they're standing at.

Jungkook then pulls Jimin's back further into his chest, enveloping him into the long black winter coat he's wearing. They waddle like that then, to and then into the vehicle, Jungkook's nose pressed to Jimin's hair and his hands clasped tightly around his tummy. Ever so often, he swoops down to peck Jimin's cheek. His brown hair contrasts sharply with Jimin's, heavy black tactile boots so different from Jimin's cute lilac sneakers.

Jimin smiles bashfully the entire time. It all feels very schoolyard romance. He doesn't look frail, or depressed, or dejected. Instead, he's become the person he always wanted to. Open and loud about his personality, like a bloomed rose in spring.

And he's moved on.

They take their seats on the last row, and Taehyung can see their heads pressed together through the window, Jimin leaning on the other boy's shoulder. Desperate to be close even in that moment.

The bus starts to pull away, springing his body into action.

Taehyung chases.

He runs and runs and runs, breath heaving and maniacal. He feels desperate, crazed, wants to storm into the bus and bash that guy's fucking head in-

As predicted, it speeds ahead, rounding a sharp corner and disappearing down the road. Taehyung screams, the sound loud and startling several passersby, some of whom had already been staring warily at the freak chasing a bus.

The moment Taehyung feels hot tears spill down his cheeks, he turns around and runs behind the wall of a building. He slaps a hand over his mouth to squash down a sob.

He doesn't remember the last time he cried. He feels like a sensitive little bitch. Rage quickly takes over. Every breath is painful, a dagger lodged deep into his heart.

All this while, he thought that he was the one who didn't care. That Jimin was the one who was suffering.

Clearly not. It's the other way round, he realizes, when he finally confronts his now pathetic life.

Jimin's even dating someone new.

Taehyung's heart feels like it's bleeding, and he's breathless. His eyes are red and blown wide, tears flowing with abandon. His jaw is clenched so hard he feels an ache resonate through his skull.

How dare he?

Jimin is Taehyung's. He belongs to Taehyung. He doesn't get to be with someone else, let someone else touch him. If they're apart, Jimin has to make do with solitude till they're back together again. He should be suffering, wallowing in regret. Still devoted to him.

If he's not Taehyung's, he shouldn't exist. Not fully. He'll pay for this…

Taehyung's mind starts to run. He's sweating buckets. Maybe this is all a big plan of Jimin's, to make Taehyung jealous and convince him to take him back. He's just acting out, pretending that he's forgotten Taehyung. There's no way he's giving what belongs to him to someone else. To that idiot, who deserves to die. He could never treat Jimin the way he deserves to be treated, the way Taehyung does. He doesn't deserve to even touch him.

Deep down, Taehyung is alarmed about why he cares so much. He'd spent the past year telling himself that Jimin didn't matter, but…

He loves Jimin. He's in love with him.

It's a simple yet jarring revelation. And it feels so right. Like coming home after spending years trudging through a brutal blizzard.

"I love you," Taehyung says aloud, testing how it feels on his tongue. He's said it a million times before. Only now, it's not a lie. He doesn't want Jimin to be with someone else. He's obsessed with him, and has fallen in love with every little detail. Bewitched by his being. Always has been, right from the start.

He can't take much more of this. The pieces start to fall into place. Taehyung's now sitting on the sidewalk, his back pressed to the closed shutter of a store. People walk past him, uncaring of his breakdown.

Taehyung doesn't want anyone else. Was never interested in the first place, and has now lost all traces of sexual attraction for anyone except Jimin. They're meant to be together. They belong together.

He can give Jimin love…he can give Jimin loyalty.

And he’ll also just have to show Jimin where he truly belongs.

There’s no other option.

Chapter End Notes

JUNGKOOKIE IS FINALLY HERE!!!!!!!!!!!!!

And that's the tenth chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 11: Caramel Cream

Chapter Notes

Here's the eleventh chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jimin wakes up to the sounds of rustling, and soft footsteps padding around.

His lashes flutter open and he makes a disgruntled little noise at being disturbed, snuggling further into the soft sheets. They smell comforting. He doesn't remember making it back to bed last night, last he knew he was reading on the couch-

Jimin feels a set of slender fingers comb his hair off his forehead, and the gentle press of lips against his skin that's still warm with sleep. Jimin's stomach swarms with relentless butterflies, and he suddenly feels giddy and calmed down all at once, his heart swelling and starting to beat faster.

“You fell asleep on the sofa last night. I carried you to bed when I got home,” Jungkook’s soft voice speaks into his ear. “Sorry I woke you up.”

“Why’re you up so early?” Jimin asks, finally opening his eyes properly. He stares up at Jungkook who’s already dressed in a loose white tee and black cargo pants. A look at the bedside clock tells him that it’s barely 4 am.

“I got a call, Sejun couldn’t make his shift so I have to fill in. Means extra money too. I’ll be back by around 9:30 am.”

“Nnnnhnnhh,” Jimin whines, shying away from Jungkook’s hand that reaches out to cup his cheek gently. “Your hands are cold. Sleep in, just for today. Please?”

He wants it so badly. It’s barely been a few months now, but Jimin’s grown to love waking up with Jungkook. He’s like a warm blanket and always loves to snuggle.

“I can’t,” Jungkook responds softly, rubbing his hands together to warm them up before he cradles Jimin’s face again. “Extra money would mean a nice barbecue date for us. And more freebies for me to get you. I’ll see if they have that lip tint you wanted earlier.”

Jungkook works several part time jobs. This one is working at a warehouse for a famous skincare and beauty company, lugging cartons of exorbitant serums and elixirs and tonics into shipping containers and delivery trucks. For his hard work, Jungkook’s manager sometimes lets him take a few of the products home, which he always does for Jimin.

“Sleepy baby,” Jungkook says, half scolding and half fond, as Jimin nearly falls back asleep under his gentle touches. There’s another soft kiss against his lips. “Bye, Mimi. I’ll be back soon.”

“Bye,” Jimin replies, still pouting. He cracks an eye open to watch as Jungkook slides on his backpack, then moves to the entrance of their little apartment to lace on his boots. Then he leaves, making sure to shut the door behind him gently so Jimin isn’t disturbed.

Jimin does sleep in. He wakes up a few hours later, at 9 am, and freshens up. He walks over to their little kitchenette and starts cooking up some rice, then frying up some eggs and luncheon meat.

By the time Jungkook's home, sweaty and tired, breakfast is on the table.

"Yummy," Jungkook says aloud. "Thanks for cooking. I'm starving."

"You're always the one who cooks, it's time I pull my weight too," Jimin reminds, flushing red when Jungkook pecks him on the cheek. The other man gives him a wide smile and sits down, scarfing down his plate as they eat together. By the time he's done, Jimin even has his protein shake ready, glad to make the other man's life just a little bit easier, and show him how much he cares. Jungkook gives him another appreciative smile, downing the drink and helping clear up before he goes to shower.

Jimin gets ready for class, pulling on his clothes and applying some light makeup. While he's brushing his hair, his eyes fall on a small bag left on their little dressing table. Jimin opens it up to find a bubble wrapped toner and face serum. Jungkook must've got these and put them here when he was setting the table. His heart swells just at the sight of them, and he isn't shy about the way he hugs them to his chest, his eyes growing wet for a single moment.

Is it stupid, the way he's jumped into this relationship with Jungkook?

It wasn't forced, not by any means, every bit of every moment felt and feels natural and perfect. Is it normal to feel this way so quickly for someone? It's not as sharp as it was for Taehyung, when Jimin had fallen so deeply in love immediately. But every day, his feelings and affection for Jungkook grow larger and deeper.

He's filling his water bottle when Jungkook steps out of the shower, towel wrapped loosely around his hips. His abs sheen with the water that clings to his skin, and Jimin's heart starts to bloom as he watches Jungkook iron his shirt with gentle hands, then get ready just like Jimin did. Small things about the other man that Jimin grows to love more and more every day.

Jimin runs up to him and presses his face into his naked back, wrapping his arms around Jungkook's waist. He noses along the bare skin, hugging him tightly. The other man is warm, and he's always got supple soft skin, something you wouldn't expect when you see his hard muscles and rippling brawn. Jungkook chuckles, turning slightly and kissing his hair.

"Thank you for the products," Jimin says, feeling almost shy. "I love them."

He would've loved them even if they were the little candies you get in mom and pop stores. He would've loved them even if they were little bundles of dirt.

"I love you," Jungkook responds, turning around fully. He leans down to capture his lips with his. Jimin sighs into the kiss, his fingers grasping at Jungkook's thick biceps. He feels dizzy.

As they get ready and leave for the day, fingers intertwined, all doubts seem to evaporate in Jimin's mind.

-

For a long time, Jimin was scared.

As he left Taehyung's house the day everything fell apart, he ran, sobbing the entire way. Ran till he managed to flag down a taxi and then lay down and curled in on himself in the backseat, terrified that Taehyung would be in one of the cars around him. That he'd see Jimin through the window, find him and hurt him.

He cried the whole way back to his dorm, ignoring the questions from his taxi driver. When he reached his room, he made it just in time to the bathroom before he threw up. He cried there, laying on the cold tiles, and the oxygen around him felt much too little. He genuinely believed that he would die, because he'd never felt pain quite like that.

Jimin's roommate hovered around, concerned and worried but not coming close. But when Jimin left the bathroom, there was a steaming bowl of ramen and some chocolate waiting for

him on his desk.

It felt like his world, everything he knew and loved, had broken to bits. Burned to ash. He couldn't feel his heart beating anymore.

Taehyung was Jimin's entire world, his everything. Every moment of every day, Jimin would be thinking about him. About the next time he'd see him, whether Taehyung would like what he's wearing, fun things for the both of them to do. His skin felt burned with Taehyung's touch, and feeling those long fingers on his thigh, on his waist, on the back of his neck was second nature. Jimin scrubbed his skin raw every time he showered for weeks later.

Taehyung never loved him.

And Jimin felt like an absolute fool. For being so blindly trusting. He often found himself wondering, in the days and weeks after, how he fell for it. Just simply accepting that Taehyung appreciated privacy, that being the reason why he never wanted to meet Jimin out in public, or anywhere close to where the rest of his friends were. That he never really told Jimin anything about where he was or whom he was spending time with, and even if he did, they were vague answers and flimsy lies that he should've been able to spot.

Jimin was always a little too trusting. Something Yoongi, his hyung, has always warned him about. When they were little, Yoongi would always be the one to run up to him and say no to the several strangers who would offer him candy. He would run to stand in front of Jimin, puffing his chest out before he told them that they didn't want the sweet. Then, he would buy Jimin some candy with his own meagre pocket money and remind him not to trust strangers.

Jimin would cry when he'd see Yoongi's incoming video calls, only to decline them and tell his hyung that his phone camera stopped working, and that he could only accept audio calls. That way, he wouldn't have to see the bruises on his face, or his swollen eyes. It even explained why he didn't answer the phone on the days he was at the hospital, because he'd broken it while he was out with his friends.

Deep inside, he knew his hyung wouldn't be disappointed in him. He'd never be. But Jimin couldn't bear for him to find out that all of his effort in protecting Jimin, teaching him how to protect himself was all for nothing. He couldn't bear to do it. So he just cried, feeling safe only during their phone calls. Yoongi would once again apologize for being too busy to visit,

and Jimin would cry harder, because he missed him so much, and felt untethered and so alone he could die. Yoongi even sent him money to repair his ‘broken phone’, and a little extra to treat himself to something nice.

Jimin wanted so badly to tell him. He’d almost let it slip too many times. Had never lied or hid anything from him except Taehyung. And it was a habit too hard to break, to reveal that he’d been hiding something so big for years. One of Yoongi’s friends to top it all off.

And there was a part of Jimin that knew how touchy Taehyung was about his sexuality, and couldn’t bring himself to out Taehyung. The only reason his friends in college never knew of him. Still caring about him despite everything.

And that’s just the thing.

Loving Taehyung came so naturally, so instantaneously, so freely that Jimin wasn’t sure if he could ever stop. He still isn’t sure.

But Jimin doesn’t feel happy when he thinks about him anymore. Just a tragic longing, and a hopelessness and heartbreak that sit deep within his psyche. The fear is still rank on his tongue, palpable in a way he doesn’t think he can ever forget, not in this life. He’d never been so scared before, and was so sure that Taehyung was going to kill him. And it’s an irrational fear that’s stuck to him.

The weight was too much to bear, and Jimin was so sure that he wouldn’t be able to stitch himself back together once it finally broke him.

Years of happy memories, all of which meant nothing. Taehyung spun lies with the same mouth he kissed him with. Wiped his tears with the same hands he hurt him with. Jimin felt stupid, and small. He thought they were in love, and was so sure that Taehyung loved him. It scared him because Taehyung was so good at it. Pretending to be someone, so good at lying it came as naturally to him as breathing. When Jimin checked his phone, he even saw evidence of Taehyung cheating on him on his birthday.

Jimin was traumatized. Never wanted to fall in love, or date again. He was so scared that Taehyung would find him that he deleted all of his social media, and quit his job. Changed his number too. He threw out all of Taehyung's gifts, a collection of items lewder than the last. It felt terrible, looking at them. It was jarring seeing them without rose tinted glasses. Where these gifts first made him feel cherished and desired, they now made him feel like a stupid, disgusting, glorified whore.

He didn't go home during the holidays, because he was afraid that Taehyung would be there, and the house held too many memories. Yoongi was once again too busy to make the trip home. There was nothing to soften his landing.

He just felt so stupid. It was all he could think when he looked at himself in the mirror. Stupid, lacking and disoriented.

Not enough to make someone stay, and stupid enough to get hurt in the process.

But still, it was enough to make him stronger.

And through all the despair and raw pain, Jimin started to change. It felt like every single minute of every day, every tear and every shaky breath, molded him like clay, strengthening his foundation and smoothing out the grit, soft edges hardening. He was the same, but he was also different. He was healing, but there were undeniably cracks that would always remain.

Jimin finally grew up.

-

Jimin's new job is working at a very instagrammable bubble tea cafe.

They have lots of fun and funky drinks, and they're always delicious, the packaging colourful and unique. It's mostly always packed throughout the day.

Jimin loves it. Usually, he's manning the order desk because his manager thinks he's the most popular and keeps people coming back. Other times, he's the one actually making the drinks. He even has his pick of the music that plays in the cafe too, and carefully curates a fresh playlist every week.

Jimin works there 4 days a week, the evening to closing shift, which ends at around 9 pm. Usually, Jungkook's there to pick him up and they walk home together.

It's a routine that they've slowly slipped into. And the familiarity of it is comforting to Jimin.

Today is Monday, the first day of his work week, and it's been a busy day.

He's taking his break when his hyung video calls, perched on a little stool in the tiny room in the back.

"Jiminie," Yoongi's deep voice drawls out through his phone speaker. *"How's your day been so far?"*

He looks tired. Jimin can see the lapels of his white lab coat, and the dark circles under his eyes. Yoongi's just always working, a relentless ethic of his that he's had since he was a child. If there were more hours in the day, Yoongi wouldn't use them to rest. Now, he's juggling school, his big cancer research internship, part time jobs and taekwondo.

"Fine, hyung. Lots of people are ordering the new strawberry cheesecake flavour," Jimin says, pointing to his pink apron which advertises the new drink. He has a matching pink cap too, and a baby blue t-shirt and pants on. " 'm just gonna go home with Jungkookie after and do some homework. I'll probably sleep early today."

"I still think it's weird that you guys are living together."

Jimin whines, kicking his feet a little.

“What?” Yoongi asks, although he does seem a smidge endeared by Jimin’s tiny tantrum. *“It hasn’t been very long for you guys yet.”*

“You just don’t like him.” Jimin pouts. “We weren’t even dating when we started living together! You know that!”

“I’m never going to like anyone you ever date. Nobody is good enough for you. Certainly not that little kid.”

“Hyung…”

“I just don’t like that this is your first boyfriend, and you guys are already living together. I don’t want you to rush things and overwhelm yourself.”

His first boyfriend.

Jimin’s stomach drops, and a familiar nausea spreads through his body. It’s always there, whenever he has to lie to Yoongi. He hates it. Gets more difficult every time.

He doesn’t respond.

“Hyung only wants the best for you.”

“I know,” Jimin says softly. “But I’m fine.”

“You’re really growing up, huh?” There’s a tinge of sadness to his voice. *“You don’t need your Yoonie hyung protecting you anymore.”*

The lump in Jimin's throat grows, and his eyes suddenly sting with tears. The change in his emotional state is so sharp, so rapid, that he doesn't manage to hide the tears before Yoongi sees them.

"C'mon hyung, I stopped c-calling you that when I was 9…" Jimin laughs wetly, but Yoongi's focus is on his sudden change of mood. He's frowning.

"Jiminie, why are you crying?"

Jimin's mouth trembles. He tries to smile but he fails, and he splutters into a storm of heaving sobs.

"Tell me what's wrong."

Jimin digs the nails of his free hand into his thigh, punishing himself for the outburst. He's usually strong, but sometimes, all it takes is a certain sentence or thought to shatter his defences. The tears are scalding where they run down his cheeks.

"I just miss you," Jimin says weakly as he sniffles, meaning it with every inch of his soul. "I just miss you so much. I'll always need you," he hiccups.

Yoongi's expression softens then.

"I'll come visit you…I promise. I'm sorry, Jiminie. This project should wrap up in a month, and hopefully I'll get time off to come see you for a few days. You'll always have me. I know I'm far away but I'm always there with you, whenever you need me."

"It's okay, I know you're busy."

“You always come first. Nothing else. I promise I’ll come see you.”

Jimin nods, wiping his tears away. He looks at the time and notices that his break’s almost over. He’ll have to wash his face and get ready to head back into the main area soon.

“I gotta go, hyung.”

“Okay,” Yoongi says. *“But I want you to call me before you sleep. And I want you to call me whenever you feel like it. Never think that anything’s silly or not important, okay? I’ll answer no matter the time. Promise me.”*

“Okay, hyung. I promise.”

“I love you.”

A fresh wave of tears.

“I love you too, hyung. Bye.”

The call ends then. Jimin pockets his phone and heads over to the little washroom, glad that he doesn’t run into anyone on the way. Their group of part timers is a friendly bunch, and they definitely would’ve pressed if they noticed he was upset.

Jimin washes his face, adjusts his uniform and heads back out with a smile, ready to work.

The rest of his shift breezes by and before he knows it, he can see the familiar silhouette of Jungkook approaching from down the street through the cafe windows. His heart skips a beat

and he rushes to hurry up and finish washing all of the blender jars, his after closing task for tonight.

He's placing the final one on the drying rack when Jungkook enters, the chimes by the door signalling his arrival. Jimin spins around, slinking out from behind the counter to run into his arms. The other man catches him in a warm embrace, swaying with him slightly, and Jimin snuggles into his soft sweater, so comforted by the other man's presence. His heartbeat starts to slow down, the world turning quieter.

"Hi baby," Jungkook greets. "Everything okay?"

Jimin nods wordlessly, hugging him tighter. He tilts his head up and kisses him then, cheeks growing warm when he sees that Jungkook has his glasses on. He's so handsome. He must've come from the library today. Jimin then sees the software design textbooks hanging out of his duffel bag.

"Everything is fine. I'm just happy to see you," Jimin answers softly, although he means it with his whole heart. Jungkook grins at him, and he waits patiently for Jimin to finish and lock up.

They hold hands as they walk back. And if they're not holding hands, Jungkook's arm is around his shoulder, or he'll have his hand perched on the small of his back. He makes Jimin feel so safe. He did tell Jungkook that there was no need to pick him up from work everytime, but the other boy insisted that it was more time they could spend together and chat amidst their busy schedules. He comes whenever he can, and lets Jimin know when he can't.

"How was work?"

"It was fine, busy because of the launch but still fun. I spoke to Hyung during my break."

"Nice," Jungkook responds, and it's so stilted that it makes Jimin laugh giddily.

“What?” He asks, leaning into Jungkook’s side.

“I know he doesn’t like me,” the other boy admits sheepishly.

“He does,” Jimin insists, kissing his shoulder.

Jungkook shakes his head, gnawing cutely at his bottom lip. Jimin thinks back to around half a year ago, when Yoongi had come to Seoul to surprise him for his birthday. He’d reluctantly introduced Jungkook to his brother as his boyfriend. It’d barely been a month since they’d started dating then.

Yoongi was shocked, and was stingy with his smiles the whole day. He wasn’t at all friendly with Jungkook, despite the other boy’s relentless efforts to get to know the other. But Jimin thinks he would’ve known if Yoongi did have a major problem with him. There’s no way his brother would be quiet if he felt something was wrong.

“How was studying today?” Jimin asks then, electing to change the topic.

“Great. I was working on my project. My professor says it’s perfect but I want to make it better, I need to maintain my rank…”

Jungkook is who you would call a gifted child. He’d never been to a cram school, yet he would always score the highest in every exam in school despite having fewer resources. He’s also won several coding and hacking competitions growing up starting from a very young age, self taught. He sailed through entrance exams and maintains the same track record here in university, all while juggling a million different things.

“You’re amazing, Jungkookie,” Jimin says.

Jungkook’s cheeks turn red. They always do, whenever Jimin compliments him.

“N-No, I’m not.”

The rest of the walk is peaceful, and Jimin takes a shower as soon as they get home. It’s relaxing, the hot water flowing down his body and relaxing his muscles. Despite working hard today, he doesn’t feel tired at all. He genuinely loves his job.

When he’s finally out, towel wrapped around his hips, Jungkook calls out to him from the bedroom.

“Baby, there’s a package for you. It arrived when you were in the bath.”

Jimin furrows his eyebrows, heading toward their tiny foyer where a medium sized cardboard box awaits. There’s no shipping label, or any sort of information anywhere. Just his name printed out on a paper and stuck to the top.

“Who delivered this?” He shouts, loud so Jungkook can hear him from where he’s working in the bedroom.

“I don’t know. The doorbell rang and I just found it waiting by our welcome mat.”

There’s no tape for Jimin to cut through either, or any protective covering or layer. It feels odd. Still, he opens it up.

And inside, he finds a teddy bear.

It’s adorable. It’s fuzzy and it’s got a big cuddly tummy and is a shade of chocolate brown. Its droopy eyes and cute nose make Jimin smile. It’s even got a cute blue bow tie, fur silky soft.

Jimin hugs it to his chest, already endeared. Yoongi must’ve sent this, because he knew Jimin was feeling down. Although the delivery *was* really quick-

There's a card in the box. Printed too. Jimin picks it up and reads it, the adorable stuffie still pressed to his chest, cradled in his hold.

Press my belly

Jimin smiles, and presses it.

"I love you, Jimin-ah. Come back to me."

Jimin freezes. The smile's wiped off his face. His shoulders stiffen as the back of his neck starts to prickle, cold sweat beading at his temples almost immediately.

It's Taehyung's voice. Deep and unmistakable as it echoes through the speaker in the bear's tummy.

He flings the bear away from him, scooching back a few feet. A million thoughts run through his mind. Taehyung knows where he lives. Does he know about Jungkook? Did he come here and deliver this himself? What's the intention behind it?

A gift like this back when they were together would've made him swoon, but now, it just makes Jimin want to run, a cold fear overtaking him.

"Babe? What is it?" Jungkook's voice calls out from the bedroom. He sounds distracted, mostly focused on his project.

"N-Nothing," Jimin responds immediately. "I think we got next door's package by mistake. I'm going to give it to them."

He runs inside their bedroom and pulls on some clothes haphazardly despite his skin still being dripping wet, grabs the bear and the box, and runs downstairs. There's a cold dread running through his veins, and his mind runs at a mile a minute. What does this mean? Jimin thought this part of his life was over…

He's quick to dump it in the garbage bin outside, whispering a quick apology to the bear. It's not its fault. But Jimin can't keep it, because it would send the wrong message to Taehyung. It would also be disrespectful to Jungkook, let alone to himself after everything.

Jimin's chest is heaving once the bear and box are inside, the shutter of the bin now closed. Deep inside, he's scared. Taehyung has never taken rejection well. In fact, he's never ever been told no. But now, Jimin has Jungkook. He's a lot safer than he was back then. He's also smarter, and tougher.

And if anything happens, anything more, he'll tell Yoongi. This time, he will.

Jimin promises himself.

The back of his neck prickles once more, and he suddenly feels like someone's watching him from afar.

Jimin doesn't turn around to check. He flees, running back upstairs, self-preservation overtaking his senses. Like a lamb escaping the butcher.

Once he's back and safe in their little apartment, the first thing he does is head to bed, curling up underneath the blanket. Just a tuft of his hair peeks out, and he feels like he's hiding. But then he hears the soft sounds of Jungkook coding on his keyboard, and his endearing hums and the little noises he makes as he concentrates. It's comforting, and he immerses himself in how safe he feels.

"Going to bed already?" Jungkook asks. "Is everything alright?"

“Yeah, I’m just suddenly sleepy,” Jimin responds, not wanting to think about anything.

“I wanna cuddle before you fall asleep,” Jungkook whines. “Maybe I should have an early night too.”

“Yes. Come to bed, *please*,” Jimin answers, still burrowed underneath the blanket.

“Okay, let me just turn on our washing machine and brush my teeth and we’ll sleep,” Jungkook says excitedly, audibly springing out of his chair and running. Jimin closes his eyes and listens to the sounds of Jungkook doing their laundry and then brushing his teeth. He wriggles his toes impatiently, making little noises of irritation every time he thinks Jungkook’s done and he isn’t.

He almost wants to cry with relief when he finally feels the mattress dip, and the smooth glide of Jungkook’s big warm body entering his safe cocoon. Jungkook is quick to pull Jimin into his chest, his strong arms wrapped around his back. His skin is soft and he smells so nice and sweet, like baby powder and something that’s so uniquely *Jungkook*.

Physical touch is their love language, both of theirs, and in moments like these, Jimin can’t help but feel like he’s drowning, laying down on a sweet cotton candy cloud that’s swathed him in love. It feels fulfilling in a way that leaves him breathless, and it feels like his heart’s full to the brim, stars twinkling in his tummy.

It’s enough for Jimin to feel drunk, and the slide into his dreams is smoother than it’s ever been.

Downstairs, a discarded teddy bear is lifted out of a garbage bin, promptly ripped to shreds by a pair of brutal hands. Furious fingers tear through soft fur and generous stuffing, a menacing growl ripping through the air.

It’s loud, and it should reach Jimin’s ears.

But all that Jimin cares to hear is the sound of Jungkook's breathing intermingling with his own.

-

Jimin felt freer when he'd managed to get rid of every tangible thing that connected him to Taehyung. All that was left was his dorm room. The space felt soaked and saturated with Taehyung's presence. And it became even more of a personal hell when his roommate moved out.

There was no one to take his place, so Jimin was left to stew in his solitude, his running mind left unchecked. He could barely sleep, his mind keeping him awake and upset round the clock.

So, he began looking for apartments nearby the moment it started to get too bad to ignore. Jimin was falling asleep in class, a permanent fatigue having latched itself onto his body. The moment it began to affect his work and future, Jimin knew he had to make a change. His eating habits had worsened too.

And he'd found a nice one. A one bedroom just a 5 minute walk from campus. It was small but bright, and also much too expensive to afford on his own.

But Jimin was desperate. He'd printed out a little flyer announcing that he was looking for a roommate, and put it up on the dorm bulletin board.

Jeon Jungkook was the only one who'd responded.

Jimin had seen him around a handful of times, the other man always brisk walking into or out of the dorm. Other times, he was in a muscle tee or compression wear with a gym bag slung over his shoulder. He did stick out sharply compared to the more meek residents of their dorm, most of whom were the more stereotypically studious type.

Someone big and built enough to be intimidating, but still sweet and polite enough to feel comfortable around. He was handsome, and would always give Jimin a sweet smile and bow whenever they passed each other in the hallways.

He knocked on Jimin's door one evening, the flyer in his hand. And he'd rambled and stuttered and tripped over his words the moment Jimin opened the door. Today was evidently one of the gym days, his strong build all the more evident with his clothing, hair still wet from the shower he would've taken before heading here. He towered over Jimin, features somehow more handsome and soft than Jimin remembered.

"Oh, Jimin-ssi! I hope I'm not disturbing you…I happened to see this downstairs. Are y-you still looking for a roommate? I know I must've seen this really late, so I totally understand if you-"

Even then, Jimin couldn't help but think he was so cute, observing his wide eyes and the scatter of pretty moles over his skin.

"Hi Jungkook, yes I am."

Jungkook seemed to sag in relief, lips spreading in a happy smile.

"Ah, that's amazing. I'm very interested. My roommate's not the best and I've been looking to move out for a while now."

Jimin was happy.

"Oh, really? That's great to hear. I've been trying to find someone for so long now…would you be free to check out the apartment with me sometime this week? So you can see it…"

"Yes, of course. I'll have to juggle a few things around but I'll be able to make it," Jungkook answered immediately, nodding too. It made his bangs bounce a little.

“Perfect,” Jimin responded, and it all felt too good to be true. “There’s also one more thing. I did mention it in the flyer but I’ll remind you just in case, it’s a one bedroom apartment. Not very big. Is that fine with you? We’ll have to share the room-”

“Yeah, it is. You can have the bedroom, I’ll take the living room,” the other man responded immediately.

Jimin was surprised. Jungkook continued.

“I work a lot…and I’m also usually at the gym for practice most days. Which also means I study late into the night…” he elaborated, grimacing slightly as he rubbed the back of his neck. “My routine wouldn’t disturb you if I took the living room.”

“Practice?” Jimin had asked.

“Oh, I’m part of the university’s new team for mixed martial arts. It’s not very big yet but there’s a lot of training.”

Jimin’s eyes widened. A sad sense of deja vu. He forcefully pulled himself out of the ditch his mind was digging for him, opting to stay in the moment and not spiral.

“But, are you sure? I-”

“Don’t worry about bothering me either. I sleep like a rock. Bedroom’s all yours.”

It really did feel too good to be true.

They exchanged numbers, Jungkook handing Jimin his phone with red cheeks, and agreed to meet the day after to see the apartment.

Things happened quickly after that. Jungkook liked the apartment, and they signed the lease. The moving process dragged on a little due to their hectic schedules but in a little under 2 weeks, they were all settled in.

Jungkook was a responsible flatmate, something Jimin could tell right off the bat - by the well-looked-after cooking and utensil set he'd moved into the kitchen and the fully stocked fridge. Jungkook cleaned the apartment with an endearing amount of attention to detail, and somehow managed to arrange his minimal belongings in the living room without making it seem cluttered, or taking away from the fact that it was in its core meant to be a shared space. He had a tiny desk and lamp, a mini bookshelf, and his mattress. Also the neat caddy of toiletries placed in the bathroom along with a loofa.

Jungkook had cooked dinner for them during their first night, and they ate it on their little dining table along with drinks to celebrate the move. Jimin felt so warm, and it felt like he was radiating happiness, somehow feeling both giddy and at ease in Jungkook's company. They washed the dishes together, took turns to shower, and chatted for a little while before heading to bed.

The moment Jimin lay in his comfy bed in his new bedroom, something that felt like a luxury considering it was larger than the space he had to share with his old roommate back in the dorm, he finally felt like he could breathe. This space was new, and fresh. Despite it being compact, it had a positive energy that emboldened Jimin to believe that maybe the dark clouds in his life were slowly starting to dissipate.

And somehow, Jungkook's light snoring from the living room, audible through the bedroom door, added to the feeling of comfort. There was just something about the other boy that made Jimin feel so light. He felt guilty still for Jungkook having to sleep on a mattress in the living room while he slept comfortably in the double bed that came with the apartment. But Jungkook wouldn't take no for an answer.

Jimin smiled, happy that he had found a new friend in Jungkook, and the other boy's face lingered in his dreams once he finally fell asleep.

-

“Jiminie!”

Jimin turns around at the sound of his name, in the midst of returning to his apartment to take a small nap before he starts studying. His eyes catch Hyora, one of his dearest friends. She’s skipping her way towards him.

“Hello,” he greets, smiling.

“Are you free right now?” She demands, nearly crashing into him.

“For a little while,” he answers.

“Please, let’s go eat cupcakes from that new bakery everyone’s been talking about. *Please*,” she whines, clinging to him. “I’ve been wanting to go for so *long* and I know you don’t have work today, let’s go!”

“Okay, okay,” he answers fondly, letting her loop her arm through his and drag him out of the campus. He slings his book bag higher up his arm, tinkling laughter leaving his lips as he almost stumbles with how fast Hyora’s dragging him through campus.

It’s a short and happy walk there, the two of them chatting about this and that. Over time, his initial large circle of friends has naturally shrunk to just a few people. The few months of downtime and little to no social interaction after he’d broken up with Taehyung hadn’t helped. He finds that he’s happy, and somehow feels more content with a smaller yet warmer pool of friends.

There’s a little bit of waiting once they reach the bakery; the cute pastel-themed storefront already has a steady line outside. They wait patiently and eventually get seated in 15 minutes.

“Should I get the totoro blueberry cupcake, or the rainbow matcha one? What do you think, Jiminie?”

“Ah, I had the blueberry one when I came here last. It was yummy.”

Hyora gapes at him, then pouts.

“You came here already? Without me?”

Jimin giggles. “Just once. Jungkook brought me here on a date.”

“Ugh, you guys are so cute together,” Hyora whines, a dreamy look in her eyes.

“No, we’re not.”

“Yes you are. The both of you look like the main couple of a BL manhwa. I’ve heard loads of people say that.”

“What?” Jimin snorts.

“You guys just look really good together, is all. He’s a big sporty jock and you’re a cotton candy princess. And the way he looks at you…why can’t I find someone who looks at me like that? He’s so attentive and he’s always touching you too, in that cute protective way. Everyone sees it. He’s so crazy about you, Jiminie…”

Jimin’s skin feels hot, and his cheeks are fiery red. His heart’s beating fast and he feels giddy, butterflies swarming in his tummy as Hyora’s words reach his ears. He’s always felt so loved under Jungkook’s gaze, but he didn’t know that it was strong enough for other people to see it too.

“Not to mention, he’s so handsome and cool…you know everyone was talking about him during orientation week. I know a million people who had a crush on him-”

“Easy,” Jimin warns, half playful, a little spark of jealousy prickling at him. “I find all of this a little hard to believe. People talk about us, and mostly nice things? No way, not with how homophobic our country is…”

“It’s because they know that if they say anything bad, Jungkook’s big and scary enough to beat them up.”

“He’s not scary.”

“I’m sure he would be, if someone tried to hurt you,” Hyora refutes. “Anyway, the point is you’re in love, it’s making me wish I wasn’t so painfully single, yadda yadda yadda. What cupcake are *you* getting?”

Jimin settles for a Kirby themed strawberry cupcake. The two of them enjoy their little afternoon, until Jimin sees the time and realizes that he was due to start studying at home twenty minutes ago.

They part ways then, and Jimin races toward his apartment, his backpack bouncing with him. Jungkook will come home late today, he thinks absentmindedly. He’s working the evening shift at that noodle bar.

Jimin dashes up the stairs once he reaches his building, and just as he’s about to input the code to their door, he sees an envelope on their doormat.

It’s a plain white one, nondescript. Again, it doesn’t look *delivered* because the envelope is still crisp, not weathered as it should be if it made its way to him through a postal service. And his name is printed out and stuck to it again, no other information.

The first thing Jimin does, before he lets himself think, is pick it up and rush into the apartment, slamming the door shut behind him. He can't help but feel like Taehyung will suddenly appear, still hasn't been able to shake off the unease that comes with the feeling that someone's watching him.

Jimin's scared. What does Taehyung want to say? How does he expect Jimin to reply, if at all?

He tears open the envelope, pulling out and opening the folded up paper inside. He sits down onto the floor.

The unmistakable scrawl of Taehyung's handwriting nearly does him in, and he can palpably feel his stomach drop to the ground, oxygen slightly sparse in his lungs.

The teddy's sad you threw him away,

He cried to me all night,

But I held him and told him,

That everything's going to be alright,

The Jimin I know wouldn't do such a thing,

Ever so polite,

Maybe you've been set off the wrong path,

I'll have to set you right,

I know you miss me,

See me in your dreams every night,

I love you so deeply,

Just like I did at first sight,

Come back, Jimin,

I hope you won't put up a fight,

I might not be as forgiving as last time,

And wouldn't you be a sad little sight.

Poetry?

Jimin's befuddled, and he's also terrified because the underlying threat is loud and clear. He immediately starts to cry, overcome with frustration and fright.

"No no no no no," Jimin sobs, holding his head in his hands. He thought this was over. It's been more than a year since they broke up, why suddenly…

Jimin sits up in a jerk, wiping away his tears with furious hands.

He's not going to be scared by this, he tells himself, even as his teeth chatter slightly. He's not going to be stupid again.

Jimin stands up and runs toward the window, opening it and ripping the letter to shreds with barely restrained anger, letting the slivers of paper fall down to the streets outside. Jimin never litters, but now he wants to send a message. He's sure Taehyung is watching.

Jimin shuts the window then, makes sure the front door is locked, and then coops up in their bedroom. He's barely able to focus on his schoolwork, and eventually just gives up, curling up in bed and reading webtoons on his phone.

At around 8 pm, Jungkook comes home.

And Jimin frets over him as soon as he sees him, because Jungkook's got a massive gash in his eyebrow, barely attended to with some gauze.

"What happened?" Jimin asks, holding Jungkook's face in his hands. His heart hurts, he hates the sight of Jungkook being hurt so much.

“Nothing,” Jungkook answers, tilting his head to kiss Jimin’s palm before leading the both of them to the sofa. “I was working and somehow tripped, fell fat on my face and the bowls I was carrying shattered too, the porcelain cut right into my skin.”

“Oh no,” Jimin whines, hugging him tightly. “Bad bowls.”

“Bad bowls,” Jungkook agrees, laughing. “It was so weird, because I was so sure that my feet were nowhere close to the table legs. To be honest, I almost thought this one customer tripped me but he seemed really shocked too, so…”

“I don’t like seeing you hurt.”

Jungkook chuckles.

“This is nothing. You’re going to have to prepare yourself for next month.”

“What’s next month?”

“Fighting season. All the collegiate and big matches. You haven’t seen me fight, have you? I know Yoongi-hyungnim does taekwondo, but MMA is much more brutal. I’ll be coming home with my face beat up nearly every day. I probably won’t since I know I’m good, but I’m warning you just in case.”

Jimin can’t stand the idea of sweet, *sweet* Jungkook in an archaic fight, getting hurt.

“That also means they’ll put me in the kitchen for work, since I might scare the customers if I continue to wait tables while injured,” Jungkook chuckles. “Don’t look so scared. It’s just a sport. I’ve made some of my best buddies through these fights, and we met smashing each other’s faces in.”

“How did you even get into fighting?” Jimin asks, unsure how to process all of this information from Jungkook. With people like Yoongi, and even Taehyung, the idea of them fighting isn’t so hard to believe, because they have hard personalities. But Jungkook, he’s soft. He’s so much like Jimin in how sensitive he is, in how he loves so freely and expresses his emotions with everything he’s got.

Jimin isn’t sure how to put it into words, but Jungkook is the type of boyfriend he always wished he had. And now, knows he needs. It feels appropriate. Taehyung was too dangerous mentally, and Jimin now feels like he was much too young for him in some sense, despite Taehyung just being a year older. Now that he’s able to look back with a clearer and now aware mind, he realizes that what was lacking in its core in their relationship was respect, which is the most important form of love.

“I was at my gym working out, when I was around 14, and my trainer told me that I have the build for fighting. He referred me to a gym, and I’ve been training ever since. Pretty simple, no angsty back story or anything.”

“You were working out at 14?” Jimin balks. At 14, all Jimin did was eat pocky and squeal at idols and dramas. But to be fair, that’s all he does even now…

“Yeah,” Jungkook responds. “Anyway, I gotta go to the emergency room and get stitches. You wanna come? Thought I’d stop by and pick you up first so we could grab dinner after.”

“Are you turning your very necessary first aid into a date?”

“Yes.”

Jimin stares at Jungkook, suddenly feeling in its entirety how much he *adores* the other man. His eyes trail over his handsome features, sharp jaw and strong nose, to his long eyelashes and soft hair, to the toothy grin spreading over his soft pink lips. Jimin’s heart stops for a second, and he suddenly feels like crying all over again when he feels Jungkook’s strong and long calloused fingers threading through his.

And then his vision drifts up to Jungkook's large eyes, taking in the way he's looking at him, like Jimin's the centre of his gravity. His whole body feels hot.

Hyora's words echo in his ears.

And the way he looks at you…he's crazy about you, Jiminie…

Jimin places both of his hands on either side of Jungkook's face, and pulls him in for a kiss. He's careful not to touch the injury, sighing into his lips when Jungkook deepens it. It's slow, and deep, and sensual, and Jimin feels the breath rush out of his lungs when he finds his back against the sofa cushions, Jungkook looming over him.

"Off," Jimin whines, tugging at Jungkook's t-shirt.

The other man chuckles, reaching for the hem of the loose black fabric and lifting it over his head. Jimin eyes the strong muscles of Jungkook's highly defined abdomen, and the adorable spatter of moles across his skin.

"You wanna do this right now?" Jungkook laughs.

"Yeah, but we c-can wait. We should probably get you to the emergency room-"

Jungkook stands up onto his feet and sweeps Jimin into his arms in one smooth motion, carrying him like he's weightless. Jimin squeaks, clutching his broad shoulders for support as Jungkook carries them to the bedroom.

Jungkook lays him gently onto the soft mattress, crawling onto it along with him. That's another thing about Jungkook, he's so gentle with Jimin. Handles him like he's glass. And he always wants to be close, just like Jimin does.

“I’d rather spend time with you than go to an emergency room and get stitches which will probably be ripped out the moment my matches start.”

“Baby, we live together,” Jimin points out, shivering when Jungkook’s fingers travel underneath his loose hoodie, caressing his bare skin.

“So?” Jungkook prods, leaning down to mouth at the feverishly hot skin of Jimin’s neck.

“So you can spend time with me anytime, we should get you patched up-” Jimin cuts himself off with a choked moan, his back arching slightly as Jungkook sucks a hickey into the sensitive spot underneath his ear.

“I can never spend too much time with you,” Jungkook reveals, so soft, and Jimin’s heart skips a beat before it positively jumps as Jungkook gets him out of sleep shorts. He slides the soft material off his legs, leaning down to kiss him once more. Jimin’s quick to wrap his legs around Jungkook’s waist, crossing his ankles and pulling him closer.

Jimin hugs him tightly, and there’s something so inexplicably comforting about the weight of Jungkook over him, the feeling of his chest pressed against his, the large hand smoothing down his bare thigh.

“You want to?” Jungkook asks once they break apart, his nose nudging Jimin’s as he checks in once again.

Jimin nods.

It took him a long time to be intimate with Jungkook. Not because he did anything to scare Jimin, nor did Jimin think he would, but he was just terrified of being used or giving away that part of himself again. It felt scary, to be so vulnerable with someone when you were already dealing with scalding burns from the past that hadn’t yet healed. Jungkook was patient, and in the end, it was Jimin who initiated their first time.

Jungkook knows Jimin very well. He knows the sensitive parts of his body, and he knows what makes him feel good, and he knows how to read his body language and pick out even a smidge of discomfort.

Jungkook holds his hand as he sits up and reaches for their bedside table, picking up the bottle of lube concealed in the drawer. They're still half dressed, Jungkook in just his sweats and Jimin in just his hoodie, but neither of them seem to care.

Jungkook lubes up his fingers generously, and Jimin spreads his legs to let him slot his arm in between, wrapping his own arms around Jungkook's broad shoulders. His breath hitches once he feels the slick digits prod at his rim, and his body slackens as one enters him, slow yet deep. Jungkook's fingers are thick, and they make everything feel different and so overwhelmingly good.

He kisses Jimin during, making him feel drunk and distracted, only wavering peaking breaths leaving his lips every time he's stretched further. Jungkook isn't impatient, he's always thorough in prepping him. It's been a long time since Jimin felt the raw jolt of pain that he'd grown accustomed to, because back then it was the only thing he knew. He scissors his fingers and stretches him, sometimes teasing him and shoving his fingers into the hilt, jabbing the bundle of nerves that make Jimin's entire body seize up and then melt with overwhelming pleasure.

"I'm ready," Jimin gasps, mostly impatient. "P-Please-"

Jungkook kisses him once more before shoving the waistband of his sweats down, sitting back and lubing up his cock too. It's so pretty, thick and long and flushed. And when the thick head of it presses against Jimin's hole, he already feels his eyes roll back into his head with how good it feels. Jungkook pushes in, slowly yet charged, his hands on either side of Jimin's waist, thumbs stroking the highly sensitive flesh.

"You're so beautiful," Jungkook says, and Jimin opens his eyes to look at him, the red flush coating his face spreading down to his chest. It feels hot and sticky, the air around them, clouded with arousal and desperation and love.

Jimin shudders as Jungkook's length stretches him out, so satisfying it makes him want to sing. His fingers are fisted in the sheets, his toes curled.

“Hurts?”

“N-No,” Jimin answers immediately, gasping once he’s stuffed full, Jungkook’s hips finally meeting the plush fat of his ass. He can feel it, the way his rim struggles to accommodate Jungkook’s cock, clinging to the length. It’s almost too much. He doesn’t want to admit it, but he loves the way it makes him feel small, the deep ache something he’s grown to love.

Jungkook rolls his hips tentatively, encouraged once Jimin’s soft cry of pleasure reaches his ears. He starts to fuck him, building the pace up slowly, thrusts powerful and deep. Jimin chokes on a breath each time, nails scrabbling at Jungkook’s back. He’s swallowed underneath him, no sign of him visible under Jungkook beyond his little hands clutching his back and shoulders.

It feels so *good* and Jimin loses himself in the rhythm. With Taehyung, everything was fast and hard and charged, overwhelming all of Jimin’s senses. But with Jungkook, Jimin feels like he’s drowning, and the slow slide into an endless abyss of ecstasy is one he’s realized he loves more.

He craves every bit of it; the feeling of Jungkook pounding into him so deep, the way it knocks the breath out of his lungs. The shockwaves of pleasure he feels when Jungkook hits his prostate, and the unbelievably attractive smirk on his boyfriend’s face as he continues to slam into that spot. The feeling of Jungkook kissing him breathless, and the hand that grips his face tenderly.

And his favourite part, how cherished he feels the entire time.

Jimin’s orgasm is slow building, the fire burning hot in his gut and then spreading to the rest of his body, making him feel dizzy and drunk. And when it snaps, his vision burns white hot, his back arching as he whimpers. Jungkook continues to fuck him, grinding into his prostate in slow, firm little circles to prolong the feeling.

“Keep going,” Jimin begs, as he feels himself start to come down.

Jungkook laughs then, picking up the pace once more and drowning Jimin's cries of oversensitivity with a kiss. He reams into his hole, strength evident in the way the bed frame hurtles across the floor, and Jimin's mouth drops open, tears beading at the corners of his eyes.

Jungkook slams into him with a few hard, powerful thrusts before he groans, his release spilling inside him. Jimin sighs, feeling content, and Jungkook leans down to kiss him once more, continuing to fuck him lazily as he comes down himself.

"I love you," Jungkook confesses, hugging him tightly. "I think I fell in love with you the moment I first saw you," he confesses, a smidge quieter.

Jimin pulls back, skin glowing and flushed, furrowing his eyebrows.

"What do you mean?"

Jungkook's cheeks turn pink then, and he averts his eyes.

"I d-didn't know what it meant then, how I felt about you. I had moved into the dorms late, and I saw you in the dining hall my first evening there. I remember my heart just stopping for a second before it started to beat super fast, and I forced myself to stop staring at you because it was rude. But all I could think about was that you were so pretty, and that you had the most gorgeous and comforting smile I'd ever seen. I kept finding myself feeling super shy whenever I'd see you…"

"What?" Jimin asks softly. He had no idea about this.

"This is embarrassing," Jungkook whines, burying and hiding his face into Jimin's neck.

"No, tell me." Jimin feels a burst of fondness in his heart, and kisses Jungkook's cheek, hugging him.

“I figured out that I had a crush on you…but I was too shy to do anything about it. And then I saw your flyer, and I really had been looking for a new place so it felt a bit surreal. I was so scared that you’d tell me that you already found someone, but I was also simultaneously hoping that you would have because I wasn’t sure how I’d survive living in the same space with you. I totally thought I would’ve embarrassed myself…”

“You didn’t,” Jimin reassures immediately. “You were perfect, just as you are now.”

“You’re just saying that.”

“No, baby,” Jimin laughs, kissing him even harder. “I’m so happy you came to talk to me. I’m so happy we live together, and I’m so happy that you’re my boyfriend.”

Jungkook smiles, and he swoops Jimin up into his arms once more, carrying him to their bathroom. They shower together and then take the bus to the hospital where Jungkook gets his stitches. A yummy pasta dinner follows, and they go home and conclude their somewhat busy day.

As Jimin tries to sleep, he happily recollects Jungkook’s words from earlier that evening. He’s got his cheek resting on Jungkook’s chest, the other man’s hand wrapped around his lower back and waist. Jungkook’s been told to sleep on his back until the stitches heal.

I think I fell in love with you the moment I first saw you

Jimin’s cheeks redden, and he hugs Jungkook tighter.

But then he freezes, because he realizes that he’s heard the exact same sentence before. From Taehyung. He remembers the exact moment too, funnily enough. It was the day of Taehyung’s big swim meet at SNU, when Jimin was still reeling from how much Taehyung had scared him during that argument they had about his makeup.

And then, he thinks about Taehyung's letter from today.

It doesn't make any sense. If Taehyung cheated on Jimin, it obviously means that he doesn't care about him, let alone love him. Why would he do these things? Taehyung was hot and cold, suffocatingly possessive but still so detached. Almost like Jimin was simply an item in his possession, rather than someone he was dating.

Seeing Jimin rip up his letter would've been enough of an answer. Jimin's sure. Taehyung will stop now, because he never cared about Jimin to begin with. This must all be just one big joke played on him. Like their entire relationship.

Jimin's eyes start to sting with tears, and he feels his heart break once more. It always does, whenever he remembers.

Taehyung must've laughed so much at him. At his gifts and promises and expressions of love, his desperation to be with him. Jimin was nothing but a joke to him, just someone stupid who gave all of himself away, let himself get hurt physically, and emotionally in an irreparable way. Just a stupid little kid who doubled up as an easy target. Taehyung must've found it so funny, making Jimin believe he loved him, stringing him along for three years with an act so believable there was no room for doubt.

It still breaks him. The heartbreak, and the longing.

Jimin might be a joke. He was. That's all he still feels like, if he's being honest. He would give Taehyung a standing ovation for his performance, if he could.

Is Jungkook lying too?

No, he isn't.

Because Jungkook isn't like Taehyung.

He makes Jimin feel important. He's told his family about Jimin, and doesn't treat him like a joke or something to hide. He's open about his love, and he loves him bravely.

Jimin closes his eyes, letting himself focus on the sound of Jungkook's heart beating against his ear.

But still, he somehow can't fall asleep, and he's wide awake as the sun rises hours later.

-

It wasn't long before Jimin realized that what he felt for Jungkook was more than friendship.

His heart would jackrabbit in his chest whenever he'd see the other boy, which was quite often considering they lived together. Jungkook was just so perfect. Well mannered and polite, funny and charming and endlessly adorable. It didn't help that he was so handsome, and so attentive. He felt reliable and safe.

Jungkook had a soft voice, and always smelled nice. He had gentle eyes and shiny hair that would sprout up adorably in different directions after a night of sleep. He was hardworking, responsible, caring, and too much for Jimin to handle, yet exactly what he needed all at once.

But Jimin wasn't having it.

Because even months after they parted ways, Taehyung still had a stronghold over his life.

Jimin would be daydreaming about Jungkook, against his will, and he'd bump into something and jolt his arm, the one that dislocated when Taehyung yanked it.

A minor bump, something people would usually laugh at, would send Jimin travelling back into time, delivering him right to that dirty bathroom in the warehouse. His forehead would throb and searing pain would spread across his cheekbone, the phantom sensation overtaking him.

And then he'd be rendered silent for the whole day. Unable to do so much as speak. Or eat, or talk, or focus on anything but breathing which in itself felt like a herculean task. His friends would try to talk to him, but he wouldn't be able to focus on their words, or muster up a response. Everything felt too loud against his ears and his head felt like it was underwater. Jimin could best describe it as being trapped in a parakeet's cage, able to look outside through the slivers of light but ultimately being condemned to where he was. It happened often, memories triggered by the slightest actions, the most inconsequential sensations that reminded him of Taehyung.

Jungkook slowly started to make it better. Less frequent.

They'd spend weekends together, exploring the city and trying out new things. There wasn't room for anything else to occupy his mind, because it was always full of *Jungkook Jungkook Jungkook* whenever they were together.

It didn't make sense to Jimin, because he didn't think it was possible for him to like someone new. To fall in love again. Not after everything that happened. And certainly not mere months after everything that happened.

But it was Jungkook. And Jimin really didn't stand a chance.

Falling in love with Jungkook was something that happened against his will, and something Jimin buried deep into the back of his brain. He never intended to act upon it. He didn't want to either. But when he had his little episodes, Jungkook wouldn't push. He'd drape a blanket over Jimin and sit next to him, not touching, but close enough. It was a silent form of comfort that reminded Jimin that he was safe. And the implication was clear; Jungkook was there if he needed him.

Jungkook was just so different.

For one, he never seemed disgusted or put off by Jimin's makeup habit, or his feminine clothes. Rather offered genuine compliments, and even expressed deep happiness when Jimin offered to let him apply some eyeshadow on him. The sight of Jungkook's gentle hands holding the applicator and brushing the glitter over his eyelids stayed with him for days. He was kind, patient, and in touch with his emotions. Their conversations flowed both ways, and Jimin cherished every one. He grew eager to learn everything there was to know about Jungkook, and it all felt addictive. It didn't help that he was so handsome.

Jimin's friends would tease him, because almost all of his time was spent with Jungkook. They'd talk about how it was so *obvious* that Jungkook had a crush on him, and the conversations would fluster Jimin. He'd adamantly insist that he wasn't interested, but deep inside, his heart and tummy were doing happy little jumps.

Slowly, Jimin started to not think about Taehyung as much. The heavy weight over his chest slowly began to lessen, still there, but no longer glaringly suffocating.

One day, Jimin and Jungkook were watching a movie in their living room. His head was resting on Jungkook's shoulder, and the other man's arm was curled around his waist. He was pressed to Jungkook's side, hands balled up and placed on his thighs. An intimate cuddling position that came to them naturally, and that neither of them wanted to comment on to avoid it becoming awkward.

Jimin's heart was thundering in his chest, and he looked up at Jungkook for a fraction of a second to steal a glance, because he loved looking at Jungkook. But Jungkook was looking at him too. They were so close that their noses brushed, Jungkook's minty exhales of breath hitting his skin. Jimin could feel the heat radiating off both of their cheeks.

The air between them grew too thick to ignore, the sounds from the movie fading into the background. All Jimin could focus on was the pretty mole underneath Jungkook's bottom lip.

"Can I?" Jungkook had asked, eyes brimming with hope, his arm tightening over Jimin's waist.

Jimin didn't stop to think.

“Yes.”

And then Jungkook kissed him. Simply leaned down and captured his lips with his, soft and slow and intimate. Jimin had balled his fists in Jungkook’s sweatshirt, pulling him closer. He could’ve sobbed with how amazing it felt, giving into something he knew he wanted, and the confirmation that the other boy felt the same way. Jimin eventually ended up in his lap, clinging to him with his arms wrapped around his shoulders.

Jungkook spent a long time kissing him, so good at it that it made Jimin dizzy. Jimin’s heart thundered in his chest, and he felt drunk, but there was also an edge of anxiety clawing at his mind.

Suddenly, he was panicking.

“W-Wait,” Jimin said, breaking apart. He dipped his head low, eyes focused on the sofa cushions and Jungkook’s thighs.

“What’s wrong?” Jungkook asked, cradling the side of his face. He tucked a stray strand of Jimin’s hair behind his ear.

“Don’t do this if you’re not serious about me. I don’t want to be someone you hide. If you want to be with other people, you c-can’t do this with me,” Jimin blurted out, his eyes already brimming with terrified tears. “Don’t treat me like a joke.”

“Why would I want to hide you?” Jungkook asked, genuinely confused. “I’ve liked you for ages. I don’t want anyone else.”

“How do I believe you? You could just be lying,” Jimin croaked, eyes hard and unforgiving although the confession made him bloom. It felt like his core was exposed, raw and decaying. The ugly side of him was now visible.

“I’m not a liar,” Jungkook said. “I know someone’s hurt you in the past. I know. But I’m not him. I love you; I’ve fallen in love with you. If I wasn’t serious about you, I would say it. I’ll do anything to make you believe me.” He gently took Jimin’s hand, pressing it to his chest. Jimin could feel Jungkook’s thundering heartbeat. “This is how you make me feel. If I didn’t care, I wouldn’t be so nervous and happy right now.”

Jungkook hugged him then, and Jimin buried his face into his neck, tears blotting his sweatshirt.

“Trust me,” he said. “I won’t hurt you.”

“You’re just saying all this because you want to sleep with me,” Jimin snapped as he looked up at him, so sure of it. “And then you’ll lie to me and do things behind my back.”

The moment Jungkook’s eyes widened and his face fell, the words that flew out of his mouth finally registered in Jimin’s mind.

“W-Wait, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean that—” Jimin spluttered, frustrated with himself. “I know you’re not like that.”

He was sure of it, because Jungkook truly was nothing like Taehyung. But everything that happened, it made him irrational, and that scared him. There was always room for betrayal. But Jimin wanted so badly to believe him, and knew he should. It was just so difficult and felt painful. Like dangling yourself over the ledge of a cliff, wondering whether to jump despite knowing that you wouldn’t survive the damage from the fall.

“I would never do those things. I would never ever hurt you,” Jungkook responded immediately, holding his face in his hands. “Let me show you how you deserve to be loved, Jiminie. Give me a chance, let me make you happy.”

Jimin stared up at him, eyes wide and wet.

“Give me a chance,” Jungkook repeated, almost pleading, leaning in and pressing his forehead to his.

Jimin was silent, and Jungkook gave him his time, simply stroking his thumbs over Jimin’s cheekbones to catch his salty tears.

Eventually, Jimin found himself leaning up and pressing his lips to Jungkook’s in a silent confirmation. All it took was Jungkook kissing him back for *Taehyung* to regress to something that would rarely, if ever, occupy his mind from that point onward.

It was the best decision Jimin ever made.

-

“Here’s your order, have a lovely day and please visit again!” Jimin chirps, handing a few highschool girls their drinks. They take their tray from him with barely concealed giggles, cheeks pink.

Jimin moves to start preparing the next order when one of them speaks up.

“Excuse me!”

He turns around immediately, finding that one of the girls has stayed behind, lingering by the order pickup counter. The rest of her friends are seated in one of the booths, eyeing them with poorly hidden excitement. They’re regular customers, and Jimin sees them more often than not.

“Yes, how may I help you?” Jimin asks, smiling at her kindly. He adjusts his apron.

“I w-was wondering if-” she starts, pushing her hair behind her ear. Jimin waits patiently for her to complete her sentence. “I was wondering if I could please have your number!” She blurts out.

“Ah,” Jimin answers nervously as realization dawns over him. He thinks hard about how to navigate his way through this. “I’m sorry. I’m not interested in women. And I think I’m a little too old for you in the first place.” He adds a watery laugh in the end. “You’re very pretty. I’m sure there are lots of handsome boys for you in your class. I’m sorry once again.” He bows in apology.

“O-Oh, you don’t have to apologize!” The girl splutters, seeming a little red in the face. “Oppa is very pretty. I should’ve known.”

Jimin laughs, half endeared and also because he isn’t sure how to respond to that.

“Thank you,” he responds, bowing once again.

“Do you have a boyfriend?” She asks, and her eyes are starry now.

“U-Uh, yes. I do,” Jimin answers, still smiling. “I’m very sorry but I have to return to work now. Lots of orders.”

“Of course, thank you!” She responds before she dashes toward her friends. There’s a bout of silence and rushed whispers as she tells them what happened, and a chorus of high pitched squeals and coos once she reveals his sexuality to her friends.

Jimin sighs, his back to them as he blends together another drink. Being fetishized isn’t exactly new to him, but at the very least it’s better than being cursed at or even attacked. And they probably don’t know any better, they’re still so young.

“Mr Popular~” Yeonjin, his coworker, sing songs. Jimin gently elbows her in the ribs playfully, rolling his eyes.

The rest of his shift passes by the way it usually does, Jimin's brain just operating on autopilot as he prepares drinks and takes over the cashier when it's his turn. The rush is near overwhelming, not a single slow moment for Jimin to catch his breath. Even his 15 minute break was cut short.

But before he knows it, it's 9 pm. And Jungkook's strolling in on the dot, dressed in shorts and a muscle tee with his gym bag. Jimin notices Yeonjin stealing a few glances, and he walks over to Jungkook and hugs him so everyone knows he's Jimin's.

"Hi," Jimin says, pouting. He rests his chin on Jungkook's chest, looking up at him with puppy eyes. "I'm tired. My feet hurt and I don't want to walk anymore. Want you to carry me home."

"Sure," Jungkook agrees immediately, smiling widely. "I love carrying you."

"I was joking," Jimin whines.

"But I'm not. I'll carry you home," Jungkook insists, a playful glint in his eyes. Jimin stands up on his tippy toes and presses a kiss to his cheek.

"Let me just quickly change back and clock out, then we can leave," he says, zipping to the little room for the employees toward the back of the cafe. Today is the only day of the week he has someone to do this shift with, so he leaves Yeonjin to handle the closing formalities.

Jimin heads to his locker, frowning when he hears his phone vibrating inside. He hurries to unlock it, but the call has already ended by the time he gets it open.

A look at his notification tab reveals 43 missed calls from an unknown number.

Jimin frowns, immediately anxious, and he's about to return the calls before there's a push notification from KakaoTalk. He's just received a voice note from the same number.

Jimin doesn't hesitate before he plays it, terrified that it's an emergency.

"Jiminie…"

Jimin immediately wants to throw up. Taehyung's voice echoes in the little space.

"You're not picking up my calls. You're tearing up my letters, and you're throwing away my gifts. This isn't how I thought you would be. You're disappointing me a lot, Jimin."

Jimin's legs start to shake, and his phone clatters to the ground, Taehyung's voice is still thunderingly loud in his ears.

"I've tried to get to you several times right now. Do you know how easy it would be for me to snatch you away? I'm not a coward to keep messaging you from afar. It's just annoying because I've noticed that you now have a guard dog round the clock. He's tall and strong but he's got a stupid little face that makes him look like a bitch."

Even as he's saying these things, Taehyung's voice is calm and cold like steel. Jimin slaps his hand over his mouth, tears falling over his apron and clothes.

"I know just how much of a cockslut you are, Jimin. You were made for me. Bet your little bitch boy has a tiny prick. Tinier than yours. I know you're just trying to make me jealous, but we both know that no one can fuck you as well as I do. Bet he's a cuck with a negative IQ, a total bonehead. You just like picking guys bigger than you because you want to be thrown around. You loved the way I treated you, don't lie. And what I also know is that you need to be fucked seven ways to Sunday to get your brain working right. Always so stupid, until I would skullfuck you and rattle your little brain so it would finally start working again-"

Jimin feels bile rise up his throat, and he starts to shake. He covers his ears with his hands, squeezing his eyes shut as he whimpers.

"Point is, he can't protect you from me. Even if he's pissing around you to mark his territory. I'll fucking gut him and gouge his eyes out if he keeps poking at my patience. You can't keep hiding from me. You're not good at playing hard to get, Jimin. You've been fucking tripping over yourself to get rawed by me for years. I know how much you want me. And guess what? You've finally won."

A few seconds of silence pass, only Taehyung's breathing audible.

"I love you, Jimin. I really do. I'm in love with you. And if you come back, sweet and polite like I know you to be, we can be happy together. I won't cheat on you again. I promise. And well…heh…if you don't. We've both seen what happens when I'm angry. You can't act out with me, Jimin. I know everything there is to know about you. And I also know that you love me too. You always have. The outcome is absolute. We will be back together. It's just up to you whether you want it to be easy or not. Not sure anyone will be able to fix you when I'm done with you, if you continue to act like a whore. Yes, I've seen your new hair and makeup, and I'm sure you're spending all day choking on Jeon Jungkook's micropenis. But let's not let it get to that. I know what scares you, and I will not hesitate to show you where you belong. You either exist with me, or not at all. Think carefully."

It ends then.

And Jimin scrabbles for his phone, just as a few more messages roll in.

Unknown Number: You've listened?

Unknown Number: Good.

And then the voice note is deleted.

Jimin cries out, both angry and petrified. His fingers tremble as he hastily types out a response.

Me: I hste you

Me: fuck off and leave me alone

Me: you cant hurt me anymore

Me: If you do anythinngh to me I'll tell my hyung

All messages are read immediately.

Unknown Number: :)

Unknown Number: You're gonna tell Yoongi, huh? Let's see about that.
Unknown Number: I'm going to find this fun, Jimin.

Unknown Number: You fucking bitch

Unknown Number: Just know that you asked for it.

Jimin screams then, sobbing uncontrollably. He can't stop shaking, barely able to see through his tears as he watches Taehyung delete their entire conversation. He curls up over the floor, bringing his hands up to yank at his hair.

He hears thundering footsteps before the door to the room slams open, and Jimin finds himself in Jungkook's arms immediately. The other man settles onto the floor and pulls Jimin onto his lap.

"What happened?" Jungkook demands, almost shouting. His eyes are wide. "I heard you from the main area." He pushes Jimin's hair off face, wiping away his tears and staring at his red face.

Jimin can't speak. He can't breathe. All that leaves his lips are choked little breaths and excruciating sobs, heaving.

"Baby, tell me what's wrong. What happened? Are you hurt?"

Jimin cries even harder, burying his face into Jungkook’s neck. He can’t tell. He can’t. Jungkook doesn’t know about Taehyung. No one knows about Taehyung.

If Jungkook finds out about Taehyung, he’ll leave Jimin because he’s stupid.

Jimin just shakes his head, sobbing uncontrollably, his fists balled into Jungkook’s shirt. Jungkook's arms around him are strong, holding him tightly.

“Let me help you,” Jungkook pleads. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

The words don’t come out. Jimin can’t speak. He can’t string together any syllables on his tongue. It’s like he’s stopped working, has forgotten how to operate his own body.

Eventually, Jungkook realizes that Jimin isn’t going to speak. He’s quick to stand up with Jimin still hugging him, placing an arm below Jimin’s bottom to support him. He uses the other hand to get Jimin’s bag from the locker and sling it over his shoulder, eventually leaving when he has all of his things with him. Yeonjin watches silently, concerned.

Jungkook carries him all the way home in a fast jog, just like he said he would. He uses both his hands to support him, and kisses away all the tears he can reach.

“We’ll be back home, baby, just a few minutes more,” he promises. Jimin can feel Jungkook’s heart rattling against his, indicating that his boyfriend is panicking too. Jimin just closes his eyes, clinging to Jungkook as he continues to cry. It feels like he’d never be able to stop.

He’s so scared.

When Jungkook manages to get them to their apartment in one piece, the first thing he does is set Jimin onto the bed. He’s quick to get him out of his work clothes, and Jimin tries his

hardest to cooperate as Jungkook asks him to lift his arms and stretch out his legs so it's easier. All he can do is cry, hiccupping ever so often.

Jimin is then led to the shower, where Jungkook washes away his tears with warm water, stepping in with him and hugging him tightly, rubbing his back to get rid of the hiccups.

"You're going to be okay," he says, angling Jimin's face up to meet eyes. He leans in and presses two kisses to his eyelids, and then one to his lips. When Jimin's all clean, he's dried and clothed in one of Jungkook's large hoodies.

He's ushered into bed, and it's finally when he's in Jungkook's arms that he starts to calm down. His head throbs painfully, and it makes him cry more despite it all.

"Jimin, baby…"

"C-Can't tell you," Jimin manages to get out, after nearly an hour of being nonverbal.

"Why not?"

"I just c-can't.."

Jungkook's silent before he nods, hugging Jimin tighter.

"Do you want me to call your hyung for you? If you'd rather talk to him about it?" Jungkook's tone is soft but Jimin can pick out how hurt he is at not being trusted, and it makes him even sadder.

"N- No," Jimin responds immediately.

“I don’t want you to suffer alone. This looks serious, Jimin. I’m always here for you, I want to protect you.”

“Can’t,” Jimin says once more. “Please b-be with me all the time. Only for a little w-while. Don’t leave me alone. Please.”

Jungkook looks at him, nodding immediately.

“Of course.”

“ ‘m sorry,” Jimin blubbers then, a fresh wave of tears streaming down his cheeks. “It’s not because I don’t trust you, it-it’s just so hard,” he sobs. “There are so many things I can’t tell you because I’m too scared. I need t-time.”

There's something keeping him from telling Jungkook, or telling anyone, even his hyung. He's been feeling it. Like there's something he doesn't know. It's scary beyond belief.

“Don’t apologize,” Jungkook responds, kissing his forehead. “I’ll wait forever. I’m not going anywhere.”

“I love you,” Jimin sobs.

They stay like that then, for the rest of the night. Jungkook doesn’t move an inch, only rubbing Jimin’s back. Their bedside lamp stays on and they’re both packed tightly underneath the fleece blanket. A few times, Jungkook nods off. But he’s quick to startle himself awake, pulling Jimin closer each time, consoling him when he sees he’s still crying.

Crying out fear, or rage, or sadness; Jimin isn’t sure. He’s livid at the way Taehyung spoke about Jungkook, overcome with grief that the past he thought he escaped is coming back to haunt him, and just so *sad* that he’s still weak despite it all. Jimin’s still scared.

The entire night, he keeps pushing himself to jolt Jungkook awake and tell him everything.

Jungkook knows that he was in a horrible relationship where he was cheated on, but that's the extent of it. Jimin never wanted to speak about it, and Jungkook didn't want to make him uncomfortable, because he knew Jimin was still carrying heavy trauma. It was evident, in his gaping insecurities at the start of their relationship, to the way Jimin sometimes still jolts with surprise when loved so deeply by Jungkook in public. Also including the recurring nightmares and times where he flinches at everything.

It's all too big now. Too daunting for Jimin. To reveal so much. It's terrifying to him, and it's self destructive. He tells himself that Taehyung isn't someone to worry about. He's a coward, and no longer relevant in Jimin's life. He doesn't want to reopen old wounds. He doesn't want Jungkook to have to deal with that. He's scared.

Sometimes, he still has nightmares about hiding in Taehyung's bathroom, and the raw fear he felt as he had no choice but to watch Taehyung break the door down. He'd never been so frightened in his life, and was so sure he was going to die. And he'll never forget the look in Taehyung's eyes at the warehouse, all the blood.

Jimin can't do it again. He can't put himself through it, even if it's a conversation he wants to have with the people he loves so badly. And he can't shake off the feeling that there's something he doesn't know; something horrible for him waiting around the corner to get him if he tells. It feels like a shadow looming over him.

The fear is all encompassing, clogging his senses and choking up his lungs, and it still is when they start their day the next morning.

Chapter End Notes

They are finally together <3 I've been waiting this post this chapter for AGES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I wonder what's going to happen next....(cringed as I typed this)

And that's the eleventh chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 12: Prey

Chapter Notes

Here's the twelfth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jungkook takes a few days off work so he can be with Jimin. He keeps the restaurant shifts because that would be around the time Jimin's working too, when he won't be alone till Jungkook can come get him.

Jimin's always looking over his shoulder.

A day and a half passes, although it feels like a decade.

They’re watching a movie at home when Jungkook’s phone starts to ring.

“Uh,” Jungkook says once he picks the device up. Jimin looks at him, eyes red and face sallow.

“Who is it?” Jimin asks softly, sitting up.

Jungkook turns his phone toward Jimin, so he can see his screen. The caller ID is displayed in loud letters.

Min Yoongi Sunbae-Nim

“What? Why is he calling you?” Jimin gasps. He then grimaces when he realizes that he’s been avoiding Yoongi’s calls for the past two days.

Before he can tell Jungkook not to answer it, his boyfriend answers. It’s a video call.

“Hyung! H-Hello. How are you?”

“Give the phone to Jimin.”

Jimin immediately slaps a hand over his mouth, shaking his head at Jungkook. If he sees Yoongi, he knows he’ll start crying.

Jungkook’s face is blank, but his eyes are conflicted.

“He’s not here.”

"Don't fucking lie to me, kid. I know he's there. Give him the phone," Yoongi responds, and the harshness of his voice makes Jimin flinch. Realizing that he doesn't want to put Jungkook in this uncomfortable position for any longer, he leans over and takes the phone.

"Hi," he says guiltily, not quite meeting eyes with the Yoongi on the screen. His brother's wearing a loose black t-shirt and seems to be in his studio apartment.

"What happened to your face? Have you been crying?" Yoongi demands, his face contorting into a deep frown almost immediately upon taking in Jimin's appearance. *"What the hell is going on over there? You haven't been answering any of my calls."*

"I-I-" Jimin tries to reply, but his voice wobbles. The tears start building, his face starts to scrunch up.

"Jimin," Yoongi warns, tone low. *"Don't lie to me."*

"I c-can't tell you, Hyung," Jimin sobs, starting to cry all over again. Yoongi softens once he sees him wipe his eyes. Jungkook reaches over to hold his hand, although he doesn't do more, letting them have their conversation.

"Shit," Yoongi sighs, eyes no longer hard. *"Jiminie…talk to Hyung. What's bothering you?"*

Jimin just keeps shaking his head, crying harder every time Yoongi presses.

"Jimin, tell me right now. Is someone troubling you? What's wrong?"

"No," Jimin refuses, hiccuping. "You'll be angry with me."

“I could never be angry with you.”

“Y-You’re just saying that!” Jimin wails. He feels so frustrated he could die.

How would he even begin to explain everything? Just tell Yoongi that he’s been lying to him about something so big for years, involving someone he’s close to? That Jimin was injured and didn’t tell him, that he snuck around and did all the things Yoongi told him not to under his nose? Jimin has seen Yoongi when he’s angry, and he feels like he’s just a small child again. Yoongi loves him, he knows, but the fierceness of his love also translates to anger when it has to. Jimin can’t handle being scolded, can’t comprehend how to even start talking about everything, because he’s so terrified. He doesn’t think he can survive the disappointed look in his hyung’s eyes when he finds out about everything. To see him realize that Jimin lied to him for years, and for what? It feels too daunting, especially when he’s already so terrified.

It’s like there’s tape over his mouth. He wants to, but there’s so much holding him back. And that voice that tells him that something horrible will happen if he tells.

“I can’t make it better unless you tell me what’s wrong.”

“No one can make it better,” Jimin croaks. “I don’t feel like talking anymore. I’m going to sleep. Bye, hyung.”

Jimin leaves his phone on the sofa as he heads to the bedroom.

“Jimin! Get back here, we aren’t done talking-”

“Hyung! I’ll look after him, don’t worry, I just think he needs some time. He’s already better since the other day-” Jimin hears Jungkook say, before his voice cuts off as he closes the bedroom door shut behind him. Jimin fiddles with his phone as he curls up underneath the blanket, playing some stupid cat cafe simulator to numb his brain. As he hears the sounds of Yoongi’s voice raising outside, audible even through the door, the hot tears leak out of his eyes anyway.

The exhaustion catches up to him. Jimin hasn't been eating well, nor has he been sleeping well, and his burning eyes start to droop shut on their own accord. He feels weak.

By the time Jungkook's done trying to placate Yoongi, Jimin's dead asleep, the cheerful soundtrack of the game on his phone doing nothing to wake him up.

-

They have a relatively peaceful few days.

Jimin kept expecting Taehyung to materialize before him, or send him more menacing messages, but there's been radio silence so far. It's both easing yet absolutely terrifying.

Jimin goes to work. He goes to class.

Jungkook still doesn't leave him alone, and Jimin accompanied him to the gym a few times. It felt like whiplash, seeing his usually gentle boyfriend be so tough in the ring. Jungkook's got fast reflexes, and you can see the power in every punch and kick of his. He's unbeatable, and Jimin would've typically swooned if his vision didn't keep flickering through time, Jungkook morphing into Taehyung at his taekwondo meet all those years ago, when Jimin saw him for the first time.

He does spend some time alone, at home. Always makes sure his mind is preoccupied one way or the other, with games or music or dramas or studying. Or even sleeping, whenever his brain lets him. It's like his mind is fuzzy, and there's a cold chill always surrounding him. He's uncomfortable.

Jimin lays in bed, scrolling through his phone at 5 am. Jungkook had to leave for his shift at the warehouse, and Jimin wasn't really asleep to begin with. He's rolled up in the sheets, eyes burning and red as they bore into his phone screen.

He’s looking at a message from Yoongi, sent the previous night.

Best Hyungie: Jiminie, I can only get time off to come see you next week.

Best Hyungie: I’ve booked my bus ticket for 6 days from now. I’ll see you Saturday afternoon.

Best Hyungie: Hold on just a little while longer. We have a lot to talk about. I love you.

Jimin sighs, sinking further into the sheets. He locks his phone, abandoning it somewhere in the bed.

He misses Jungkook, suddenly needs to feel his warm hands on his skin, or the sensation of his soft breathing on the back of his neck.

Just a few hours more, he’ll be back from work then.

“Just a few hours more,” Jimin says aloud. He turns onto his back, staring up at the ceiling. The sky is still dark outside.

Jimin’s eyes start to drift closed, and over the next few minutes, he falls into a feather light snooze. Awake but not quite, transcending into and out of consciousness. It’s a brittle form of rest that he’s come to crave, and he’ll take it even though it’s less than ideal.

The doorbell rings.

Jimin wakes up with a jerk. He immediately sits up on his elbows, eyes wide and red, his head feeling heavy and a little doozy.

Did he just imagine that?

He scrabbles through the sheets for his phone, checking the time once he finds it. It's nearly 6 am. There's no way someone's at the door, not this early. Jimin stares ahead of him blankly in a sleep deprived haze.

The doorbell rings again, startling Jimin. He lets out a small shout, slapping his hand over his mouth.

Jimin slowly gets out of bed, flinching as his bare feet make contact with the cold floor. He inches his way toward the front door, blood rushing through his ears, lips pressed in a tight, quivering line.

He's terrified.

Jimin stands up on his tiptoes to look through the peephole.

He can't see anything, because something is covering it. The shift of warm red makes him realize that it's a hand, a horrifying revelation. Whoever it is isn't letting him look.

Jimin won't open the door.

Not when he's so sure who it is.

He runs to their bedroom and crawls under the blanket, curling up into a ball and covering his ears, starting to sob when the doorbell continues to ring. He doesn't know what to do. He dials Jungkook's number, only to remember that his boyfriend won't have access to his phone until he's done with his shift.

The moment he starts to hear pounding on his front door, Jimin screams.

It's so loud that it rings in his ears, nearly reverberating through his chest. He panics more with every second that passes.

Jimin runs to the kitchen and grabs a knife. He then hurtles himself back to the foyer and moves their heavy wooden shoe rack to rest against the front door, something that would curb whoever it is from breaking the door down. He almost falls with how desperately he tries to shift the furniture, his arms suddenly too weak. Still, his resolve makes up for the lack of muscle.

"I'll call the police!" Jimin screams, furious and terrified, tears streaming down his face. His knees shake like those of a newborn fawn, quivering. "Leave me alone!" He points the knife toward the door.

The pounding stops then. It's so immediate that it's terrifying.

And then, he hears a bemused chuckle. One that's undeniably Taehyung's.

"Leave me alone!" Jimin screams once more, although it devolves into a sob. He darts backward into the apartment, stumbling on his feet and falling. "You can't hurt me!"

All he hears is the rustling of something underneath his door, the sound of laughter and disappearing footsteps.

Jimin's eyes zero in on an envelope on the floor, obviously slid in through the gap underneath the door.

He snatches it, nearly ripping it open in his haste to see what's inside. The knife clatters to the ground next to him.

And nothing, nothing could have ever prepared him.

It's a series of printed out pictures.

All of Jimin, with his lips wrapped around what only he knows is Taehyung's cock. His eyes are wet and his lips are swollen and red, at least in the shots in which they're open. You can see the lingerie set he's wearing as clear as day. The shots range from him taking the entire length down his throat, to mouthing at the head all drooly and wet, to having the appendage slapped against his cheek, and then a few of him crying. There are six of them.

He looks like a whore.

Jimin cards through the pictures with wide eyes, kneeling on the floor. These are all from the video Taehyung took of him that day all those years ago, the one Jimin saw him delete. He knows he saw him delete the video…so how…

Jimin doesn't think he can describe the feeling washing over him. It's something like ice, where his brain isolates from the rest of his body.

On the back of one of the pictures is some scrawled writing. Jimin tries to read it but fails through his tears, wiping at his eyes and trying several times before his brain cooperates and is able to interpret what's written.

If you'd love to tell Yoongi about us, so would I. I'm sure he'd love to see these pictures. You'd make him so proud. Gagging on cock, doing what you always do best. Jungkook would be thrilled to see these too, knowing his boyfriend's already thoroughly trained in being a whore. Along with SNU's Dean and faculty, as well your parents and all your friends. As much as I'd love to be the only one to see these, you're too beautiful not to share with the world. Don't tempt me.

I can't wait to see you again.

Jimin's eyes are wide, his mouth dropped open. The millions of scenarios play through his mind against his will: Getting expelled from college, being scorned by all of his friends, and his career ending before it even started. All his hard work for nothing.

Jungkook leaving him.

Yoongi abandoning him.

His life destroyed, in every possible way. Revenge porn is devastating in their society, and the digital footprint of it means you can never truly escape it. It would end Jimin's life in a flash. He might as well be dead. His mother's been talking about starting her lifelong dream of opening her own small clothing business, but this would raze their family's reputation to the ground. Make them one big laughing stock. Yoongi's future that he's worked so hard for would be over too, his father might get sacked. His family's life will be ruined too.

Jimin doesn't think he's ever felt so defeated.

The fight leaves his body, in that moment.

Initially, there were so many escape routes. No matter how difficult it would be, Jimin was sure that at some point, if it got bad enough, he'd have no choice but to tell Yoongi and Jungkook. To rely on them, just as he wants to and just as they want him to. He could've gone to the police. He could've simply just run away.

But now…Jimin is trapped.

His intuition was right all along. The little voice in his ear. He can't tell anyone. Taehyung's got a knife to his throat.

It's a mix of renewed heartbreak, fear, and disappointment. That Taehyung would lie to him and take this video without his consent, keeping it and using it even after Jimin cried and begged him to delete it. Now using it to destroy his life.

Jimin feels helpless, in every way.

His eyes drift to the kitchen knife abandoned on the floor, next to him. The fresh sunlight streaming through their windows makes the blade gleam, its razor sharp edge suddenly seeming like a promise.

Jimin picks it up, small fingers curling over the wooden handle. It's from the prized set of professional cooking knives Jungkook uses and treasures. He sharpens them every few days, so they slice through veggies and meat like butter.

He doesn't know what comes over him, but his hand brings the blade to his wrist on its own volition. The sharp edge of it presses into his skin, digging into the blue vein he can see through his pale unblemished flesh.

Jimin's breathing is ragged, tears spilling down his cheeks.

Just a little more pressure…just one slash…

Jimin wills himself to do it, his eyes hard. To just end this before it's too late. This way, even if Taehyung does release the pictures, Jimin wouldn't exist anymore to see his life crumble.

He'd be one step ahead of him, have the last laugh.

Jimin's phone beeps, and he snaps out of it. Not before the knife manages to slice through the side of his wrist, the blood trickling down his hand and dripping onto the tiles.

The blade clatters to the floor loudly, and he's terrified at the revelation that he was going to end his life. His head reels, a painful throbbing battering his skull. He was just about to do it. Was just an inch away from killing himself.

He takes heaving breaths, feeling the panic attack loom over his shoulder. He's already feeling hysterical.

Jimin stands up on shaky legs, stumbling his way to the bedroom and locating his phone. The trail of blood follows him.

Best Hyungie: You saw these already? Why are you up so early? You need your rest.

Best Hyungie: Hyung is on his way to the gym. If you're awake, call me and keep me company. We can chat.

The blanket of safety is suffocating. That even the slightest of actions, hints of discomfort go noticed by those who love him.

Jimin sighs shakily, closing his eyes as he starts to cry so hard he doesn't know what to do with himself. He curls up on the floor, bringing his knees to his chest. His tears drip over his phone screen. To know that he's going to lose this, it kills him.

Time passes in a sordid haze. All Jimin can focus on is the wrenching of his heart, and how cold the tiles of the floor feel against his skin.

He's jerked to reality once more by the sound of the front door beeping, and the thud of it knocking into the shoe rack still kept there.

"Huh?" Jimin hears Jungkook say. Jungkook tries once more, the wood colliding with the heavy furniture once more.

"Jimin? Why's the door blocked?" Jungkook calls from outside, sounding alarmed.

Jimin pushes himself onto his feet, moving toward the foyer. And the blood drains from his face when he sees the pictures still strewn over the floor where he'd dropped them, abandoned after he'd seen them.

"Jimin?" Jungkook shouts once more. "Fuck."

Jimin starts to panic, gathering the pictures haphazardly and running toward the bedroom. He can hear the shoe rack jerking with every panicked push from Jungkook. He can't throw the photos away, because their bin is empty. And he can't throw them out the window because anyone could find them and see them.

Jimin stuffs them under the mattress just as he hears the shoe rack fall over with a loud noise, and the thundering sound of Jungkook's footsteps as he storms his way into the apartment.

The moment their eyes meet, Jimin starts to panic.

"What's going on?" Jungkook asks, sounding equally freaked out, making his way over to him and taking hold of his shoulders. "Why did you block the door?" He then looks at the floor, taking in all the blood as his eyes blow wide. "Did you hurt yourself? Why are you bleeding so much, what happened?"

Jimin's lips tremble, his eyes wide and wet as Jungkook meets his gaze.

"Jimin, for god's sake, you have to tell me!" Jungkook shouts then, although the words are more panicked than aggressive. He takes hold of Jimin's wrist, observing the open wound.

"S-Someone was ringing the doorbell at 6 am and I couldn't see who it w-was. I got scared and bloc-blocked the door."

It's not a lie.

Jungkook stares at him for a second before he pulls him into a bone crushing hug.

"I was so fucking scared. You wouldn't respond, and I couldn't enter. I thought something happened to you," Jungkook exclaims as he breathes heavily. "How did you hurt yourself?"

“I took out the knife just in case and accidentally nicked myself.”

“Shit,” Jungkook mutters, hugging him tighter. “I knew I shouldn’t have gone to work…”

“I was the one who told you to go, ‘s fine…” Jimin mumbles.

“But why didn’t you respond?” Jungkook prods then, frowning. “I called for you so many times. You definitely would’ve heard me.”

“I-I-”

“Jimin, are you lying to me?” Jungkook asks quietly, suddenly seeming sadder than Jimin has ever seen him.

“No,” Jimin responds, the word flying out choppy and sharp, too quick to be believable.

“Jimin,” Jungkook prods once more. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing!” Jimin cries, bursting into tears. “Nothing’s wrong! Why do you keep asking me that? Nothing’s wrong!”

“Hey, hey-” Jungkook gasps. “Baby, I just-”

“Nothing’s wrong!” Jimin screams, pushing at Jungkook’s solid chest. “Nothing’s wrong…” he bawls, crumpling into a heap on the floor.

“I can’t tell you…” Jimin sobs. “You don’t understand how big it is. It’s bigger than you o-or me or anything. If I t-tell you, you’ll break up with m-me. My life will be over! You’ll think

I’m d-disgusting!”

Jungkook settles onto the floor with him, holding Jimin’s face in his hands.

“I would never, *ever* think you’re disgusting. And I would never leave you. If our relationship ever ends, it’ll be your decision. Not mine,” Jungkook responds. “I love you too much to even consider it.”

“Even now?” Jimin demands, looking up at him with wide, teary eyes. “You don’t want to break up with me even now? Even when I’m off the rails, like a l-lunatic?”

“I can’t force you to tell me,” Jungkook answers. “All I can do is love you. And keep trying to remind you that you’re safe with me. And that whatever it is doesn’t have to be so scary, and that I’ll always be on your side. I’ll fight whatever it is with you. We can do it together.”

Jimin squeezes his eyes shut, his fingers fisting into Jungkook’s shirt.

All he can do is shake his head. The intangible shackles on his wrists, the invisible duct tape over his mouth; he can feel them. He can nearly taste the rancid tacky glue on his lips, the cold bite of metal against his skin. The barrel of a gun pressed to head, the weapon guiding him to jump off the ledge of a cliff.

And the knowledge that Jungkook could see those pictures, stuffed away just a few feet away from them, nearly does him in.

All Jimin wanted was a fresh start.

And he did have it. He got it, built it for himself. Made his happy little home and finally discovered what love truly meant.

It all feels hopeless. Built upon smoke.

“I mean it,” Jungkook says. “Let’s fix it together.”

“No,” Jimin says shakily, removing himself from his boyfriend’s hold. “Some things can’t be fixed.”

Jungkook doesn’t respond.

Jimin spends the rest of the day in a haze. He doesn’t talk, barely makes a sound. Just stays burrowed underneath the sheets of their bed. He doesn’t go to class. Neither does Jungkook.

He trembles, his teeth chattering, skin clammy and pale. He feels terribly cold, even though he’s wrapped tightly in his blanket.

Jimin’s too terrified to breathe, uncomfortable with the way the action makes his chest rise and fall. Makes him noticeable, easy to spot. Everytime he feels Jungkook’s hand reach out to rest against him comfortingly, the touch burns. Jimin resists the urge to shrug it off and lean into it both at once. It feels like there’s a cord wrapped around his throat, like the smallest of movements could end his life.

Jimin thinks he’s cried enough for a lifetime, over the past few weeks. He thought he’d run his tear ducts dry in the time during and after he’d broken up with Taehyung, but what he should’ve known is that no matter how bad things seem, they can always get worse. Life always has a surprise hand of cards to deal, ones that’ll push you a rung lower, sending you careening deeper into a bottomless pit of misfortune. There’s no such thing as rock bottom.

Jimin also mourns. It’s preemptive grief, if anything. He mourns the sounds of Jungkook cooking as he hears them, and he mourns the memory of his touch against his skin. It’s a decaying, relentless sort of pain that takes control of his psyche.

He doesn’t calm down, he simply worsens with each second that passes. He tries to escape by falling asleep, but his brain simply won’t let him. He’s just terrified, gnawing at his nails and biting his lips bloody. He’s so, so cold.

In the evening, Yoongi calls.

The moment Jimin feels his phone vibrate, he starts to shake harder. His eyes turn as wide as saucers, knees knocking together.

“I think you should answer,” Jungkook suggests. “It might make you feel better.”

Jimin thinks. He knows that at this point, there’s something he has to do. Everytime Yoongi calls, he presses for something Jimin cannot tell him. There’s no other option.

Jimin answers, and his screen once again floods with Yoongi’s camera feed. He’s back in his apartment and looks freshly showered, frowning as soon as he looks at Jimin.

“Hey, Jiminie,” he says cautiously. *“Just thought I’d check in because you didn’t respond to any of my messages. Are you feeling better?”*

“H-Hyung,” Jimin responds, his chin wobbling. “Don’t come to Seoul next week.”

Yoongi stiffens immediately, and Jimin can see Jungkook pause with surprise too where he stands a few feet away.

If Yoongi comes, he’ll force it out of Jimin. He knows. He can’t do that. Not when his life's on the other end of the tipping scale. If he has to choose between Yoongi being mad at him for a little while, or Yoongi never speaking to him again, he’s going to choose the first option. Just the thought of Yoongi seeing those pictures makes him want to die.

“What?”

“Don’t come. I’m f-fine now. You d-don’t need to come anymore.”

“You’re tearing up. You’re clearly not fine. Don’t lie to me.”

“I’m not lying.”

“Jimin, I’m tired of this. Tell me what’s going on. Right now.” Yoongi’s voice is hard, and Jimin can tell that his patience is wearing thin. Still, he pushes on.

“N-Nothing is wrong.”

“I’ll fix it for you. Whatever it is, I’ll fix it. Let me protect you, tell me what’s going on.”

“Hyung, I promise-”

“Don’t fucking lie to me!” Yoongi snaps, making Jimin seize up and start to cry immediately. He has never been able to handle yelling, especially not from his hyung. Yoongi never swears at him. *“Jimin, tell me what the fuck is going on right now!”*

Jimin feels bowled over with panic and distress. His breathing starts to get choppy, his eyes wide and spilling with tears. His mouth seems to stop working. Jungkook approaches, keeping a careful distance.

“I did not teach you to lie.”

“I-I-”

“You know what? Fuck this. I’m not coming next week, I’m coming tomorrow. I need to get to the bottom of this-”

“No!” Jimin screams, crying. He starts to shake. “H-Hyung, please!” He begs.

“Then tell me what’s going on!” Yoongi yells. *“I’m going to find out either way, so tell me!”*

Jimin can’t breathe. Yoongi continues to yell. The panic attack consumes him, making him feel like he’s underwater.

Jungkook takes the phone from his hands.

“Hyung, I don’t mean to interrupt but Jimin is really upset. I don’t think it’s a good idea for the both of you to continue this conversation right now-”

“Who the fuck are you to tell me when I can speak with my own brother? You stupid fucking idiot,” Yoongi responds harshly. *“Give the phone back to Jimin, and fuck off to whatever hole you crawled out of.”*

Jungkook stays calm, although his eyes widen slightly.

“And I’m not your fucking hyung,” Yoongi tacks on.

“I understand that you’re upset, but you’re just making Jimin panic. He’s terrified right now because you’re yelling.”

“I know him way better than you ever will,” Yoongi laughs cruelly. *“Know your place, and don’t stick your head in our business. I’ll make you regret it.”*

Jungkook seems speechless.

"You know what, I knew you were bad news. I bet you're the reason he's so upset. What are you doing to him, huh? If I find out you've laid a single finger on him, or made him cry, I'll fucking kill you. Wait till I get my hands on you, I'll put you fucking underground-"

"Hyung, stop it!" Jimin screams.

He can't hear anymore of this. It just confirms his fears. If Yoongi is so angry right now, how would he react when he finds out about everything? Jimin wouldn't survive.

"I would never do that. All I'm saying is that maybe the two of you should take some time to calm down before-" Jungkook tries.

"How about you shut the fuck up-"

Jimin covers his ears with his hands, trembling from head to toe. The yelling reminds him so much of Taehyung. There's just something about it, so much anger, that terrifies him and makes him feel so small. It's too much for him to handle. He smothers his face into his pillow, trying to drown out every sensation.

Soon, he loses track of what's happening. His vision starts to fog up and the pounding in his ears grows loud enough to overshadow anything else.

"Jiminie, hey," he hears Jungkook say eventually, combing his fingers through his hair. His voice sounds faint, like Jimin's underwater and Jungkook's speaking to him from the surface.

Jimin looks up at him, eyes wide. He realizes he's still crying. How much time has passed? He isn't sure.

Jungkook slides his phone into his hands, and Jimin's faced with a now apologetic looking Yoongi. He stares at him through bleary eyes.

"I'm sorry, Jiminie. I didn't mean to scare you. I shouldn't have yelled and lost my temper, it was wrong of me and you didn't deserve that. I'm sorry," Yoongi says.

Jimin doesn't respond, sniffling.

"Regardless, I'm going to be there tomorrow, okay? I promise we'll fix this together. I'm not going to abandon you, and I won't be angry."

Jimin's too tired to respond. A few seconds pass and he slumps back into bed, not having the energy to fight back, or stay present.

Once Jungkook wraps up the call, Jimin hears and feels him slide into bed next to him. His nose is pressed to Jungkook's heart which he can feel beating, his boyfriend's warm skin making him feel just the slightest bit better.

"I'm so-sorry," Jimin says. "Hyung shouldn't have spoken to you like that. It was horrible. I'll m-make him say sorry."

"He's just worried about you," Jungkook responds, although he does seem a little down. It breaks Jimin's heart, because he knows that although they didn't interact much, Jungkook always thought Yoongi was really cool. He did look up to him, and had always tried to establish a bond despite Yoongi's apathy and intrinsic dislike toward him.

And it's all because of Jimin.

"He said he'll be here tomorrow night," Jungkook says then. "He got a 9 pm bus."

Jimin sighs shakily, squeezing his eyes shut.

“I’ve got you,” Jungkook whispers into his ear, holding him close. “You’re safe with me.”

Maybe it’s the knowledge that he’s going to lose this that makes Jimin try to forget. He tries to erase his mind, only focusing on the present rather than the impending doom he can already feel looming over him. He savours it, relishes it, the moment he’s in. Wrapped up in Jungkook, drowning in his love. With his dearest hyung coming tomorrow for a visit. They’ll have so much fun together, the three of them. Jimin’s favourite people.

“My favourite,” Jimin mumbles in his sleep, just before his face pinches once more. Jungkook, still awake, kisses him before he starts to cry again. Jimin isn’t conscious to see how Jungkook loves him in that moment, stroking his hair and providing him a safe haven from the cold outside their bed. However, he must be able to feel it, because he slips into a slow, deep, calming sleep.

It’s a strangely fulfilling night of rest, one that won’t come again for a long time.

-

When Jimin wakes, he decides to get back to his normal routine because there’s something telling him that today is his last regular day.

It’s an ominous feeling.

He’s mostly spaced out as he gets ready in the morning, pulling on a yellow t-shirt he’s had for ages, and a comfy pair of jeans he’s also had for years. Jimin chose them because they’re comforting to him, and he feels just a tiny bit of happiness when he sees the little heart and sunflower he’d embroidered into the denim while he was in highschool. He fills his backpack and water bottle, laces on his sneakers, and waits for Jungkook by the door.

“Are you sure you want to go to class today?” Jungkook asks, peeking his head out from the bedroom to look at Jimin.

“I can’t afford to take another day off,” Jimin answers, which is true. SNU is SNU. He already knows that there’ll be a mountain of schoolwork to catch up on despite just missing one day, and he doesn’t want it piling up.

“But-”

“It’s fine,” Jimin responds. “I’ll go to work today too. You’ll be able to pick me up after, right?...” He trails off, eyes hopeful and wide. If Jungkook is around, he’ll be safe. And today’s the day he has to share the shift with Yeonjin, so he won’t be alone during work either. Maybe he’ll just always make sure to never be alone.

“Yeah, of course,” Jungkook responds immediately as he shucks on his jacket.

The two of them leave then, holding hands as they walk toward campus. Jimin tries to think about the yummy boxed lunches Jungkook made them. He glues himself to his boyfriend’s side, dreading having to part ways once they reach their university.

Alas, they do reach. And Jungkook is quick to pull Jimin into a warm hug, kissing his temple.

“I’ll see you today at 9,” Jungkook says, looking him in the eyes once they pull away. “That’s when your hyung’s supposed to arrive too. I’ll pick you up and we can go get him from the station together, hm? Once we’re home, you can keep him company and catch up while I go buy groceries to cook us a nice dinner.”

It sounds so nice, and safe. Jimin nods. Jungkook swoops down to peck him.

“Have an amazing day. I love you,” he rushes out before heading toward his own department. Jimin watches him as he goes, committing the sight of him to memory.

“I love you too,” he responds softly, even though Jungkook’s already gone.

Jimin’s classes go by smoothly. Luckily, they didn’t cover much the previous day and Jimin was able to catch up with no extra effort, mostly because of his far reaching habit of studying the portion in advance. He eats lunch with his friends, and spends breaks chatting with them by the vending machines. He tries to pretend that he’s feeling alright, and that his world isn’t crumbling further with every second that passes.

After his classes, Jimin gets started on some assignments in the library. He drowns himself in his work, eyes poring into his laptop screen. They’re nearing their end and there’s a lot to do. An hour and a half passes.

When his alarm rings, Jimin packs up his things and prepares to leave for work. It’s a routine that’s easy to drown himself in, because the gleaming finish line is being with Jungkook once again.

On the way there, making his way through the crowded streets toward the cafe, Jungkook calls.

“Hello?” Jimin answers.

“Jiminie, everyone’s talking about a storm alert that might hit in a few hours. I just bought umbrellas for the both of us, considering we both left ours at home. Where are you? I’ll come give it to you before I leave for the gym.”

“Oh, really?” Jimin responds absentmindedly, looking around. Sure enough, almost everyone he sees is carrying an umbrella. “Will I need one, though? I’ll be inside the cafe anyway, and it’ll be out of your way to come all the way here and give it to me. Don’t worry about me-”

“It’ll make me feel better. Please, baby?”

“Okay,” Jimin sighs, feeling fond. “I just left campus. It’ll take me about 20 to get to the cafe.”

“Cool, I’ll just drop it off there then since it’s closer to where I am right now.”

“Okay, baby. Thank you,” Jimin says. “I love you.”

“I love you more. See you tonight.”

It ends then, and Jimin takes his time to observe how overcast the sky is. It’s a deep blue, so strange for this time of day and year. The wind’s already blowing strongly, and there’s a chill in the air. Jimin sees several people rushing through the streets on his way, probably wanting to make it home before it starts to pour.

It somehow makes Jimin hurry a little too.

He’s grateful for the wave of warmth he feels when he finally enters the cafe a little while later, the space a lot less crowded than it usually is. Taemuk, the person handling the previous shift, gives him a relieved smile.

“Hey, Jiminie,” he greets.

“Hi,” Jimin responds, already heading behind the counter and toward the staff access rooms so he can get changed.

“Jungkook dropped by with an umbrella. I left it by your locker,” Taemuk calls out. Jimin shouts back a thank you, promptly slipping into his work uniform. The umbrella is a cute white one with pink flowers on it and a duckie handle, and the mere sight of it makes Jimin feel warm and fuzzy inside. He freshens up, makes sure he looks presentable, and then clocks in so that Taemuk can finally go home.

“Yeonjin’s late,” Jimin observes aloud as he takes in the list of tasks for today.

“Oh, didn’t you hear? She called out sick today,” Taemuk responds, already changed and ready to leave.

Jimin balks at him, caught off guard.

“Sorry, Jiminie.” The other man grimaces. “But there shouldn’t be many customers today because of the storm alert so don’t worry, you won’t be overwhelmed.”

That’s not at all what Jimin is worried about. What it means is that he’ll be alone for the entire shift, especially till closing. And it doesn’t look likely that there’ll be any customers past a certain point in the evening. His tummy twists with discomfort and apprehension, but he doesn’t let it show.

There’s nothing he can do about it.

“No worries. Have a great day,” Jimin bids his coworker goodbye, trying his best to muster up a smile.

He immediately starts wiping down the counters and drink stations despite the fact that Taemuk already left everything clean. He scrubs the sinks, and mops the floor. When the occasional customer comes in, he’ll get to making their drink for them as fast as he can.

Today, there’s barely any crowd. Predictably. People just order their drinks for takeaway, collect them and leave. The few people who do take the tables don’t seem to be in the mood to sit down and chat either, in a hurry to leave too. Jimin can see the wind pick up outside, flyers and slivers of paper flying through the air. It seems to get darker with each passing second.

And at around 7 pm, it starts to pour.

The rain is so heavy that you can hear it even through the glass and over the peppy songs playing in the cafe. You can barely see to the other side of the street, a mist-like effect taking form and the streetlights seeming diffused. By this time, there's just a group of 3 girls with him in the cafe. They're stuck here, and Jimin hears them pout and complain about what to do.

While he feels sorry for them, he's secretly so relieved that he won't be alone.

Jimin almost wants to dip into the lockers and get his phone to message or call Jungkook, see what he's up to in this storm. But there's no opening, because the girls keep ordering more drinks and desserts to help pass the time. They even strike up a conversation with Jimin, and he spends close to 30 minutes chatting with them.

But alas, around an hour later, a car pulls up outside the cafe. It's one of their mothers who's come to pick them up, and Jimin deflates like an anxious, sad balloon. He politely wishes them goodnight and safe travels, and dips back behind the counter.

Now, he's really alone. It's just him and the loud pop music, the bright lights and pastel decor. It's obvious that no one is going to come in in this weather, so Jimin runs to his locker to get his phone out. Jungkook should be here in another 30 minutes.

The moment he takes hold of his phone, it starts to ring. Jungkook's caller ID flashes over the screen.

"Hello?" Jimin blurts out, answering the call.

"Minnie…I'm sorry but I'm going to be late."

Jimin's mouth drops open as a cold sweat spreads across the back of his neck.

“Huh?”

“I’m in the usual bus but the roads are jammed because of the storm, I think there’s been an accident up ahead-” Jungkook responds. *“We’ve been stationary for a while now. The roads are flooded too so I can’t get down and walk.”*

Jimin tells himself to breathe.

“How long do you think you’ll be?” He asks, voice meek and quiet.

“I think I can see some police lights, they’re probably clearing up the roads now. Navigation says I’ll be there in an hour and fifteen.”

“What?” Jimin gasps. He immediately starts to tear up.

“Jiminie, stay calm. As soon as we get out of these flooded roads and I’m close enough, I’ll get down and run to you, okay? I’ll be there soon, I promise. Stay right where you are.”

“No,” Jimin sobs. “Oh god-”

“I’m so sorry, darling. Lock the doors and stay inside. Wait for me. Promise me you’ll wait. I’ll be there before you know it. Don’t be scared.”

“Jungkook-”

“Promise me.”

“I p-promise,” Jimin whispers. His head is spinning. None of this is going the way he imagined. “Please hurry.”

“I will. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Jimin ends the call, clutching the phone to his chest and inhaling a shaky breath. He wills himself not to panic. Nothing can happen to him in this weather. He’s safe here, in the cafe. Jungkook will be here soon.

Jimin does as he promised, and locks the doors. He sits down and tries to check his phone or watch something, even play a game, but he’s too antsy and restless to focus on anything. There’s a message from Yoongi, his brother informing him that he too will be delayed because of the horrid weather.

There's a cold, terrified chill spreading across his senses, and Jimin knows it won’t go away until Jungkook walks through the door. The solitude is near petrifying. Especially when there’s no evidence of any other existence right now beyond his, considering all Jimin can see is the extremely heavy rain outside and the lights of other shops and businesses.

And soon, most of those lights turn off too, as the other stores around reach closing. The bubble tea cafe's bright lighting seems like a beacon in the darkness. There’s no one outside. No cars either, which isn’t surprising considering it’s more of a pedestrian street.

Jimin tries to busy himself. He rewashes all the blender jars, double checks inventory and wipes down all the tables once more. He rearranges all the money in the cash till and organizes the refrigerator. At some point, the music feels too loud so he turns it off on a whim, only to turn it back on barely half a minute later because the silence terrified him even more. He’s uneasy, paranoid, and the downward spiral is unforgiving.

When there’s quite literally nothing else for Jimin to do, and an hour has passed, Jimin goes to the employees room. He changes, gets his bag and umbrella, and waits in the main area for Jungkook.

Soon, Jimin starts to feel very cold for a reason he can’t pinpoint.

He feels it even though he's increased the temperature of the air conditioning several times now. His fingertips are freezing, nearly numb, and there's a dread sitting heavy in his stomach. His anxious mind pushes him to just leave the cafe and run home, because he feels like a sitting duck here. For what, he isn't sure. But logic makes him stay put because he's much safer in a dry, well-lit, locked place with only him inside than cold, wet, dark streets with nothing to protect him.

Jimin shakes his leg, scratching at his wrists.

Today feels like the longest day Jimin has ever lived. He's waiting for it to be over. Doesn't think he'll ever leave his bed once he's back home.

Jimin looks up, and he almost wants to sob with relief.

Because through the windows, in the distance, he can see Jungkook's silhouette approaching from down the street. A familiar, comforting sight. It's faint, barely visible through all the fog, but Jimin can see him. His boyfriend is approaching slowly, a relaxed pace, something that mildly confuses Jimin.

He's probably tired after running all the way here, Jimin thinks. He feels so guilty. But the relief bowls over every other emotion. He's ready to go home.

Jimin springs up and grabs his bag, searching for the key so he can unlock the doors to the store. He fumbles a bit, his fingers numb and clammy, even dropping the keys to the floor. He eventually manages to get a grip on the master key, heading toward the entrance and slotting it into the keyhole.

Jimin turns it clockwise, unlocking and opening the door just as he sees Jungkook arrive in his peripheral vision.

Then, he looks up.

It’s not Jungkook.

Jimin stares at Taehyung’s smiling face, the other man grinning at him through the glass.

And nothing, nothing would be enough to describe the terror that swallows him in that moment.

Jimin’s eyes widen and he screams, rushing to slam the door back shut and lock it once more. The sound that leaves his lips is shrill and inhuman, not something Jimin thought he was capable of, a result of nothing but unadulterated fear. He manages to turn the key just in time, locking it the exact moment Taehyung dashes to enter. The other man collides with the doors that shake loudly.

Jimin flees further back into the cafe, eyes wide and streaming with tears, his breathing already choppy and terrified. He can’t seem to be able to inhale oxygen properly, the air getting stuck in his lungs and making him choke on nothing nearly every second. In his haste to run, his knees give out and he falls, tripping over a table leg in the instinctual urge to escape. The happy music of the cafe seems to mock him.

This was his worst nightmare. It is his worst nightmare, and it’s all coming true right in front of his eyes.

Taehyung’s still smiling at him. Jimin hasn’t seen him in over a year. He’s drenched, his hoodie and sweats sopping wet, yet he doesn’t seem to care. Jimin observes the stubble on his chin and how gaunt his face is, his wet clothes clinging to his muscular frame. Taehyung seems bigger somehow. It’s the worst form of deja vu, and Jimin barely manages not to throw up, or lose control of his bladder.

But the worst part is Taehyung’s eyes.

Jimin doesn’t think he’s ever seen Taehyung look like this before. There’s something wrong with him. His eyes are crazed in a way that makes Jimin want to fold in on himself and

disappear. They're a deep shade of black that looks impenetrable, and there's something deranged in them. Taehyung seems different, like he's changed in an irreparable way.

Jimin was already terrified of him through hearing his voice and seeing his writing, but looking at him right now, being under his gaze, Jimin finds himself smothered with a certain type of fear he's never felt before. A million flashbacks haunt him.

Taehyung smiles, and points to the door handle. He then mouths at Jimin.

Open it

"No!" Jimin screams, face red. He musters up a bravery he didn't think he had and runs toward the door, slotting his umbrella through the handles as another form of defence. He's quick to flee once more, running behind the counter.

Jimin is trapped. His eyes skit around the store, looking for anything, any means of escape. He can feel his heartbeat in his ears, his throat suddenly too heavy for him to swallow, heart threatening to shatter the bones of his ribs and jump out, bloody and pulsing.

Taehyung holds up three fingers.

Three, he mouths. He puts down a finger.

"NO!" Jimin screams once more, hyperventilating with fear.

Taehyung puts down the second finger. He's toying with Jimin.

Two

“G-God, please, p-please help me,” Jimin spews out, hysterical, and it feels like the moment before a roller coaster drops.

One

Taehyung kicks the door, so hard that Jimin can see the cheap lock loosen just the slightest to his horror. The doors bow, now pushing inward. Jimin’s new umbrella gets pulled taut across the handles.

Jimin screams, blood curdling and from his soul, and covers his ears. His eyes fall to his phone left on the table closest to the entrance.

Taehyung kicks again, this time harder than the last. The doors loosen once more. Jimin knows that the next one will be the final one.

Jimin dashes for his phone, grabs it and runs to the employee room. He slams the door shut behind him, dismayed when he remembers there’s no lock. He fiddles with his phone, his fingers trembling as he unlocks it and pulls up Jungkook’s number.

Just as he hits dial, Jimin hears the doors slam open, glass shattering.

He sobs, quivering with distress.

“Hello? Jimin? Baby, I’m nearly there-”

“Jungkook! Help me! HELP ME!” Jimin screams, petrified. He sobs when he hears thundering footsteps tear their way to the room he’s in. “He’s going to kill me!”

“Is everything okay? Could you repeat that, babe? Fuck, the weather’s screwing up the signal-”

The door slams open, and Jimin screams. He barely has time to look before he's flung against his locker with a hand on his throat, Taehyung looming over him. The muted sounds of Jungkook's voice through the tinny phone speaker feel nearly inaudible, because the hand choking him cuts off all oxygen to his brain.

Taehyung snatches his phone with his other hand, and throws it so hard that it shatters against the wall. He then leans in, pressing his forehead to Jimin's.

"Didn't think you were a runner, Jimin," he chuckles. "You seemed quite brave when we spoke last morning. Not even a kiss hello for me? After all this while?"

Jimin stares up at him, his face quickly turning purple. Taehyung's touch, his natural scent, the sight of his face and their proximity, it's nostalgic and familiar in a nauseating way. Jimin's eyes start to glaze out.

Taehyung leans in to kiss him, and Jimin suddenly remembers that his arms aren't bound.

He scratches at Taehyung's face, digging his nails into his skin as hard as he can, then scraping to inflict damage. Taehyung's grip loosens momentarily as one of Jimin's fingers goes up his nose, and Jimin kicks him in the knees and escapes his hold. He falls on the way as he runs, heaving for oxygen, but quickly picks himself back up just as he hears Taehyung chase after him, hot on his heels.

He manages to tackle Jimin and they both fall to the ground, Jimin collapsing onto his stomach with Taehyung's heavy weight over him. Jimin's breathing is ragged and panicked, and he looks up, spotting a small steel dustbin. He snatches it and turns to slam it against Taehyung's head, breaking free once more and scrambling to his feet. He's operating on animal instinct, the drive to escape taking over anything else.

Jimin grabs one of the glass blender jars, turning around and flinging it at Taehyung just as the other man stands once more. It shatters against his chest. Taehyung's bleeding from his eyebrow and cheekbone, and there are harsh lines of red all over his face from Jimin's nails, some pearling with blood.

“Throw another one, go on,” Taehyung coaxes, still grinning. “It’s so cute to see you try.”

Jimin’s eyes dart to the entrance of the cafe, looking at the open doors. The sound of the rain falling is deafening, so loud Jimin can barely hear his own thoughts. Still, he follows his instincts and runs.

Taehyung catches him in less than a second, grabbing his arm and flinging him back into the store. Jimin’s side collides painfully against one of the counters, and it takes everything in him not to fall. He clutches the marble for support.

Jimin sobs in pain, clutching his ribs. His eyes then catch the blowtorch on the counter, the one he uses to caramelize the sugar tops of some of the drinks. He grabs it and turns it on, pointing the flame threateningly in Taehyung’s direction.

“Stay away from me!” He shrieks, his hand trembling.

Taehyung just chuckles. He approaches, slowly, and Jimin wails with fright, backed up against the wall. He jabs the torch in Taehyung’s direction, the blue flame twitching ever so slightly.

Taehyung extends a hand, and closes it over the barrel of the blow torch. The flame scorches the skin of his palm, and Jimin’s eyes widen as the smell of burning flesh hits his nose. Taehyung doesn’t seem to care, nor does he seem to be in any form of pain, just simply letting Jimin burn his hand.

Taehyung stares at him, still smiling.

“Is there really any point to this?” He asks. “Why do you keep resisting when you know it’s not going to change the outcome?”

Jimin doesn't respond, just cries. Deep down, he knows it's true. There's no point fighting. There never was. He knew it back when he received the very first package, that he was fighting a losing battle.

Taehyung leans in to nose at his neck, eventually gripping the blowtorch and taking it from him.

"Why are you doing this?" Jimin sobs, closing his eyes. "You don't even care about me."

"Oh, Jimin," Taehyung responds as he pulls back, caressing the side of his face. He looks him in the eyes. "If only you knew."

Jimin shrieks then, an outburst of rage and frustration. He scrounges up the last bit of fight he has in him. He shoves Taehyung as hard as he can but the other man doesn't budge. He tries to punch him, slams his fists against his chest, kicking whatever part of him he can reach. Taehyung doesn't move an inch, still keeping him trapped against the wall.

"Are you done?" Taehyung asks once he eventually tires, pressing a kiss to his jugular. "The only reason I'm not punishing you for any of this is because I'm so happy to finally be with you again, touch you after so long. You don't have to pretend anymore, Jimin. You got what you wanted. I'm here to take you home."

"I don't want you!" Jimin screams, sobbing. "I don't love you anymore!"

Something in Taehyung's eyes changes then. He wrenches his hand into Jimin's hair and yanks his head back painfully, bringing his face closer to his. Jimin whimpers, flinching and squeezing his eyes shut.

"Don't fucking lie," Taehyung spits, venomous. "I know you want me. You've always wanted me. That's the reason you exist."

"No," Jimin sobs.

“You were born to be mine.”

“No! I *hate* you!”

Taehyung smiles then, and his hand comes up once again to wrap around Jimin’s throat.

“You wanna act like a little bitch and throw your tantrum, sure,” he says, squeezing hard, his thumb blocking Jimin’s airways immediately. Jimin’s eyes fly open. “I know how to put you in your place.”

Jimin starts to choke immediately, and he can’t breathe. He tries to scratch again, kick, scrabble for anything on the counter next to him that he can use to defend himself. He’s panicking.

“Fuck, I forgot how pretty you look like this,” Taehyung groans, pressing down harder. Jimin sputters and his eyes start to cross, everything spinning in his vision. He can’t sustain any more strength in his limbs. *No*, he screams in his mind. He’s going to die. It’s a heartbreaking feeling of defeat. He brings his trembling arms up to try and pry Taehyung’s hand off his throat.

“That’s it, baby. Go to sleep,” Taehyung whispers, as Jimin’s vision starts to fade. His arms drop down to hang limply by his sides, and his eyes droop shut. Jimin’s knees buckle just as he falls unconscious. His last thought before his mind drifts away is the dinner he wanted to have with Jungkook and his hyung.

Taehyung catches him, promptly swooping him up in a bridal carry and walking right out of the store, into the rainy night.

Jungkook runs into the cafe exactly two minutes later, drenched with his phone pressed to his ear. All he’s met with is broken glass, toppled tables and chairs, and the only signs of Jimin being his abandoned bag and shattered phone.

Beautiful artwork created by Alek.Dar!

Chapter End Notes

TAE HOW COULD U!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! *screeches into rainy night while shaking my fists*

And that's the 12th chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 13: Castles In Sand

Chapter Notes

Here's the thirteenth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The scorch of summer, the sprightly sound of cicadas and fresh, relentless breezy air.

Sensations that are so undeniably *home*, stimuli that transport you better than pictures or videos ever could. The feeling of cooling sweat on your back, the satisfaction of drinking iced water after a day of practice, letting the icy liquid sate your soul and replenish it.

Yoongi feels it, standing outside Jimin's classroom. They're in the peak of summer, and he's got his ice cold water bottle pressed to his neck for some relief from the heat. He'd had to cut class and head to practice for the second half of the day, because being in the 4th grade means he's eligible for more junior taekwondo tournaments. Now, he's dressed back into his

uniform and lingers outside a colourful door decorated with craft flowers. Behind it is Jimin, Yoongi's baby brother and the centre of his small universe.

It's 2pm, and it's time for them to go home. So Yoongi waits, because he and Jimin, they always walk home together. He doesn't think he would ever choose to skip a moment spent with his little brother.

Yoongi hears the bell ring, signalling that class is over. He can hear Jimin's teacher inside telling them to pack up their things, and reminding them about homework due the next day. The high pitched chorus of affirmative responses and goodbyes from the students are loud even through the door, and Yoongi smiles when he can pick out Jimin's sweet enthusiastic reply loud and clear.

The door opens, and the children scramble out, ready to go home. Yoongi peeks his head in, watching Jimin neatly arrange his books and put them into his bag gently, zipping the pink backpack closed with his tiny fingers. His chubby cheeks bulge as he looks downward, and Yoongi feels his heart swell with how fond he is.

He meets eyes with the teacher, bowing politely.

"Yoongi-ah, you're such a good hyung to little Jiminie, coming to pick him up every day," She praises, smiling at him from where she gathers her own things.

At the sound of his name, Jimin looks up. His face blooms with happiness and he squeals with delight, running to Yoongi and hugging him immediately. No matter the fact that Yoongi does this every day, Jimin is always beside himself with joy to see him.

"Ready to go home?" Yoongi asks. Jimin nods, and he runs back to his little circular table to get his bag. They both say goodbye to his teacher, and head home too. Jimin immediately holds Yoongi's hand, his soft pudgy palm snug against Yoongi's calloused one.

On their way out of their school grounds, Yoongi notices a star-shaped badge on Jimin's uniform shirt.

“What’s that?” Yoongi asks, gesturing to it. Jimin looks down and beams.

“I won first prize for today’s class activity!” Jimin reveals, thrilled.

“Oh? What activity was it?” Yoongi prods, making conversation. The sun beats down on them, but it’s a pleasant walk still.

“We had to talk about our favourite superheroes,” Jimin answers, puffing his chest out. “Teacher liked my answer best.”

“What was your answer?”

“Hyung is my superhero,” Jimin responds, nonchalantly. “Everyone else had ones from comic books and movies, but you are my favouritest.”

For a second, Yoongi is baffled.

“Jiminie, I’m not a superhero,” he eventually responds, laughing fondly.

“Yes you are!” Jimin protests, stars in his eyes as he looks up at him. “You’re strong, and you’re smart, and you always take care of me. And you give the best hugs and make me so happy! I love you, hyung! If any bad guys are around, I’m sure you’d defeat them! You are a superhero! I boast about you to my friends every day, they are all jealous of me.”

Yoongi smiles, taken aback. He feels almost overwhelmed, and touched that Jimin looks up to him so much. He makes a note to himself to keep doing these things, being there for Jimin in the smallest ways, showing him how much he is loved and valued. When Jimin was born, it felt like he was his birthday gift. Because Yoongi loves him more than anything in the world.

Jimin is soft, round with love. Yoongi, despite only being a year older, often has to act like the adult between them. But he'll do it happily, if it means Jimin can have a happy, relaxed childhood like the other children in his class.

Yoongi looks at Jimin, feeling the way his chubby hand is so small in his. The sun hangs high in the sky, golden and warm. The sound of cicadas and the hot breeze surround them.

Jimin accidentally kicks a pebble as he walks, sending it flying across the street.

"Oh no!" He cries out, dashing towards it to pick it up. "I'm sorry, pebble!" He cradles the little rock to his chest, as his other hand instinctively curls around Yoongi's again. It's adorable, Jimin's empathy for non-living things. Yoongi's noticed it for a while now, the way he treats all of his toys and belongings with the utmost care.

"I love you, Jiminie," Yoongi says, squeezing his hand.

"I love you too, hyung!" Jimin responds immediately, as easy as breathing. He then continues to gaze at and caress the little pebble, humming lightly, lost in his own world.

Yoongi suddenly feels like he needs to say more. Like there are more words to exchange, things to tell Jimin. In this mundane hot afternoon in their little town. The sudden pressure is sharp, and makes him panic. He feels like there's something he has to talk about right now, a conversation he has to have with Jimin before they make it home. It has to happen right now. Before it's too late.

"Jiminie, I-"

Yoongi startles awake.

The first thing he feels is the headache beating down on his temples, and how cold he is. His fingers are nearly numb. A look up has him face to face with the broken AC vent right above

his seat, blasting icy air all over his front. He feels disoriented, the strange warped childhood memory turned dream making him feel doozy, along with the unexpectedly deep sleep.

This bus ride has been an uncomfortable one, even moreso considering that the typically one and a half hour journey from Daejeon to Seoul has now extended over 3 hours because of the rainstorm.

Yoongi looks out the window, noticing that they're moving now. It's still pouring though.

His attention is then drawn to his phone vibrating in his pocket, what woke him up in the first place.

Yoongi slides the device out of his pocket, frowning when he sees the caller ID. It's Jimin's boyfriend, Jungkook. Yoongi resists the urge to roll his eyes.

"Hello?" He answers, his voice gruff.

"Hyung! Where are you?" Jungkook's voice is panicked. Yoongi immediately straightens up.

"I'm about 30 minutes away, I think. Why? Where's Jimin?"

"He's gone."

Yoongi's eyes widen and his brows pinch. His stomach drops.

"Gone where? What do you mean?"

“I d-don’t know. I was stuck in the rain too, and when I got to Jimin’s workplace it was empty. It looked like it was broken into.”

“What?” Yoongi snaps, his voice hard. Alarm bells ring in his head.

“I called the police. They’re at the cafe, and they’re looking around for evidence. I just went to our apartment to double check that he isn’t there. I’m trying to find him, I’m on my way to our campus to check for him right now-”

“You were supposed to be with him,” Yoongi spits. “What the fuck were you doing? And why didn’t you call me earlier?”

“I know. I know. I was on the usual bus I take to reach him on time but the rainstorm messed it all up. I was stuck, but I got down halfway and ran all the way there. I thought I could find him. Hyung, I think someone’s taken him-”

“I’ll call you when I reach Seoul. Meet me at his cafe,” Yoongi says shortly before ending the call.

For a while, he just sits there. There’s a cold, stale feeling spreading its way across his system. He thinks of little Jimin from his dream.

Yoongi dials Jimin’s number.

He’s immediately met with the automated message that tells him that the device is switched off. He tries a few more times, and then pulls up his find my phone app which tells him Jimin’s location. The last known one was from a few hours ago, and the map shows him the cafe.

A break and enter?

Yoongi's mind runs.

The cafe has lots of customers, at least according to Jimin, so there would be lots of cash flow. Not the worst place for a stick up, especially in this weather, and when there's just a single employee. But if it was a break and enter, that would mean that it was after they closed for business. Which is weird, because Jimin should've left work by then. Why was he inside with the doors locked?

Yoongi drums his fingers over his thigh, his jaw clenched. The rain continues to batter the bus window, although it seems to have reduced in intensity.

Either way, fine, they would've robbed the cafe. Probably threatened Jimin at knifepoint and made him shovel all the cash into a bag of some sorts. Jimin is smart enough to know that cooperating is the best move. Maybe after they left, Jimin was so scared that he ran away. Jungkook said that he thinks someone took him, but it would be so impractical and quite nonsensical for a bunch of thieves robbing a small cafe to kidnap a barista.

All plausible scenarios, but none of which feel quite right.

Either way, Yoongi doesn't let himself panic. Because he knows he's going to find Jimin. He's not going to rest till he finds him. He's going to find those burglars and kill them for putting his brother through any kind of distress.

And then, he's going to get to the bottom of the recent sharp downturn of Jimin's mental health.

The rest of the bus journey passes by quickly, as the rain slows down. Yoongi pushes his way to the front of the bus as soon as they pull into the depot, hopping off and walking till he flags down a taxi.

Me: I've reached Seoul, I'll be at Jimin's cafe in 20 minutes. You better be there.

Jeon Jungkook: Yes. I'm on my way.

Me: He wasn't on campus?

Jeon Jungkook: No. It was a long shot in the first place, if I'm being honest.

Jeon Jungkook: I'll see you there, hyung.

Yoongi's eyebrow raises, annoyed at Jungkook's insistence on calling him hyung. It's no secret that things have been strained between them, ever since Yoongi yelled at him over the phone. And it's not like Yoongi particularly liked the other boy before that either.

The ride to the cafe is short. The moment his taxi slows down to a stop opposite the cafe, Yoongi sees the police car and the silhouette of someone big running toward him. Yoongi pays the fare and opens the door, now confronted with a drenched Jungkook whose face is pale and sallow.

"Hyung," he greets.

Yoongi doesn't respond, stepping out and stretching out his limbs. Just a look at the cafe makes him feel uneasy.

"Let's go talk to the police," he says, slinging his bag over his shoulder and walking toward the bright lights.

The first thing he sees is the broken glass all over the pavement and floor from the doors, and toppled tables and chairs. Yoongi's jaw clenches. Was there a scuffle? Is Jimin hurt?

"Officer, may I step inside? I'm Park Jimin's brother." Yoongi asks, calling out to the two cops inside. One of them turns to look at him, and he approaches.

“Hi, I’m Officer Song. We’re still booking the evidence, so you can’t step in just yet,” he responds. “Trying to check for any fingerprints, shoeprints and the like. Has he contacted either of you?”

“No,” Yoongi responds. Jungkook shakes his head, his eyes on the floor. “His phone is switched off.”

“We know why that is,” The officer replies, heading further into the cafe and picking up a clear bag with something inside. When he returns, Yoongi and Jungkook see what they both know is Jimin’s phone, or *was* Jimin’s phone, considering that it’s in pieces.

The mere sight of him makes him uneasy. If they were this violent, it’s possible that Jimin was hurt…

“It was in the employee room. Someone threw it against the wall, probably when your brother tried to call for help. We’re scanning police records to see if we had a call come in from his number in the last few hours.”

“Jimin called me,” Jungkook reveals. “The line kept breaking because of the weather. The call dropped and I tried returning it but it wouldn’t go through.”

“Why would he call you during a robbery? Wouldn’t it make more sense for him to call the police?” Yoongi questions, frowning. An irrational part of him is hurt, wondering why Jimin didn’t call *him*.

“Maybe because he knew I was nearby, and I’d reach him faster-” Jungkook responds, eyes wide as he rambles the words out.

“This isn’t a robbery,” Officer Song cuts in.

Both of them shut up almost immediately. Yoongi quirks up an eyebrow, bowled over with surprise.

“What do you mean?”

“All the equipment is in order and there’s still plenty of cash in the till. We’ll check the books in a while to cross check the amounts and make sure it’s all as it should be, but from my experience, this isn’t a robbery at all. Nothing was taken.”

“So what, then?” Yoongi demands, his eyes wide. “What’s going on here?”

Officer Song sighs.

“You need to prepare yourself for the very likely possibility that your brother has been kidnapped.”

Yoongi stiffens, although his face remains blank. Jungkook’s mouth drops open and tears spill from his already red eyes. He brings his hands up to rub at his face, then moving upward to sink into his hair with distress.

“It’s not for certain. But at the moment, this is what I believe is the most likely scenario,” the officer elaborates. “Still, we’ll wait 24 hours before we file a report. He’ll most likely turn up before that, or contact you, so keep an eye out.”

Yoongi’s throat suddenly feels dry, and his face sears with the shocking news. He can feel his heart hammering in his chest.

Jimin, his baby brother, is missing. The person who means the world and more to Yoongi, his greatest gift. He clenches his jaw, fingers balling up into fists. None of this feels real.

If only he’d come a day earlier. He would’ve been able to stop this.

“I suggest the two of you head home and get some rest. It’s important in case he returns. In the meantime, we’ve already put out an alert in the system for officers nearby to keep an eye out for him.”

“We’re not going home,” Jungkook responds immediately, his voice rough.

Yoongi looks upward, his eyes focused on the CCTV cameras which were the first thing he’d noticed upon entering.

“Have you checked the footage?” He asks, pointing at them. There’s one right in the corner that points toward the main seating area. Yoongi spots another camera on the wall behind the counter, and also sees one by the door, pointing outside.

“Not yet. We’ve already called up the franchise owner and the manager, we’ll have the tapes come morning.”

“We’ll wait till you have it.” Yoongi’s voice is firm, non-negotiable. The officer gives them both a wary look before he sighs, nodding as he heads back inside the cafe to speak with the others from his team.

“Hyung, look,” Jungkook nudges him, pointing toward a broken umbrella on the floor. “I bought that for Jimin today. It’s been snapped in half.”

Yoongi stares at it, seeing how each piece is on either side of the door. His mind runs.

“He slotted it through the door handles,” Yoongi deciphers. “It must’ve snapped when whoever it was broke the door open.”

It makes his blood boil. Yoongi knows that he needs to think rationally, but it’s so difficult. He knows that if he allows himself to stop and register what’s happening right now, he’ll lose it. He can’t afford to lose it, not when his time would be better spent coming up with useful

solutions to fix everything. Especially considering the fact that Jungkook's barely holding himself together.

Just the thought of a terrified Jimin having no choice but to watch an assailant break the door down, with no one to protect him makes Yoongi nearly go insane. Insane with rage, shame, heartbreak, he isn't sure.

And it's even more perplexing, because there's no clear reason for any of this, at least at face value. Money obviously wasn't a motivator; the till full of cash and Jimin's belongings left behind in perfect condition evidence enough of that fact.

The image of a serial killer, or someone mentally unwell just picking Jimin as a target is haunting.

Yoongi steps out of the cafe, eyeing the pavement outside for any clues. It's all clear. The rain would've washed any footprints away. He can see some faint ones on the floor of the cafe, hopefully those could result in some leads…they're too big to be Jimin's…

The hours pass. The sun rises.

Jungkook and Yoongi wait, although not together. Jungkook lingers inside the cafe by the edges, as far as he's allowed, and Yoongi stands by the entrance outside. His eyes burn, and his throat feels scratchy. There's a void in his chest, and it burrows deeper with every sordid second that passes. Where is Jimin? Where? It's near unbearable, the slow passage of time. Excruciating because it eats away at his hope that all of this is simply *nothing*.

The moment another police car pulls up, barely past 7 am, Yoongi perks up and Jungkook dashes outside. Out step 2 people, a middle aged woman and a meek looking man. The officer Yoongi spoke to steps out to greet them.

"Come in. We need the footage as soon as possible."

The woman nods, grimacing slightly as she takes in the state of the cafe. She must be the franchise owner. The unassuming man next to her follows behind, a laptop in his arms. The office gestures for Jungkook and Yoongi to follow them inside. They must've finished booking everything.

The process of plugging in the laptop and hooking it up to the local network is rather quick, but it feels like hours to Yoongi who watches from a few feet away. The man logs into the software to check the footage, and signs in, entering the required credentials.

Yoongi can hear the blood rushing through his ears, stomach twisting and turning. What is he going to find? What is he going to see? He's not sure he can handle watching someone hurt Jimin.

But he has to. To find out who it was so he can pay it all back in kind.

The man clicks enter, and frowns immediately.

"The cameras are off," He says, right off the bat, and looks up at the individual cameras around the space. "There's no feed. It says 'connection lost'."

"What?" The cafe owner responds immediately, seeming disbelieving. "That's not possible."

"Ma'am, it's mandated by law to have functioning security and surveillance systems in your place of business," Officer Song reminds. "Care to explain? This negligence could cost you your operational licence."

"I just had someone come in and verify everything was in working order a week ago!" She exclaims in response. "I have no idea why they aren't working."

Yoongi feels like he's about to go insane. His fists are clenched, nails digging into his calloused palm.

“I’ll go check them,” The security employee sighs, walking into the store room of the space and returning with a ladder which he props up by one of the cameras. He climbs up, reaching for the device and scrutinizing it before he pauses.

“Um,” he says. “The wires have been cut.”

“What?” Jungkook demands.

“Yeah. Someone’s cut them,” he repeats, pulling out the wires to show them. They’re frayed, sliced through haphazardly. “I’m willing to bet the others have been cut too.”

“So you’re saying this was premeditated?” Yoongi asks as a chill spreads through his system. The situation, the possibilities grow more harrowing.

“I’m not sure about that. But what I can tell you is how far back the cameras were disconnected.”

“Okay,” Officer Song sighs. “Step down. We’ll have to photograph and book the cameras too.”

It’s as they’re checking the disconnection details that the cafe owner speaks.

“Officer, I’m sorry, but I was wondering how long my cafe would have to be closed for business? This is usually our busy season and I was counting on-”

Something in Yoongi just snaps.

“I’m sorry, is the disappearance of my brother bothering you?” He spits, his voice icy cold. “It must be so inconvenient that you’re losing out on business because someone has

kidnapped him, and that we need the space to gather evidence to find him. My deepest fucking apologies. Doesn't matter that he could be hurt right now, right? As long as you get your underpaid employees to make and sell your tacky drinks."

She laughs awkwardly. "I'm sorry if I offended you-"

"You put up flimsy doors that were easily broken down. And you cut corners by putting Jimin, my little brother, alone on a late night shift. Do you think this would've happened if you weren't so fucking cheap and just hired another employee like every other cafe? I know he does this shift alone most nights. You left him all alone here to become a victim. And all you care about is getting inconvenienced and losing out on a day of business. Fuck you."

There's a cold thick silence that spreads over the space then. The woman averts her eyes, her gaze focused on the floor now.

"Let's all calm down," Officer Song says with a laugh that's half a grimace.

"Finding my brother is more important," Yoongi finishes. He then looks at the security guy. "Are you done checking?"

"Uh, yes. There's been no feed for the past 4 days. And someone seems to have powered down the cameras prior to that, so I can't see how it happened."

"Have you tried checking the backdata?" Jungkook asks. "Is there a timestamp?"

"Yeah. It seems that someone just shut down the power to the store at around 4 am. They must've cut the wires then, which explains why there's no footage of them even entering the cafe."

"They've been planning this for a while," The officer deduces. "Do you know if Jimin had anyone he didn't get along with, or someone who wanted to hurt him? Perhaps a debt collector or something similar."

“No,” both Yoongi and Jungkook respond immediately. They look at each other then, and Yoongi suddenly realizes that perhaps Jungkook is better suited to answer the question. The revelation makes him sad to a point he can’t quite describe. Their time spent apart has now yielded its result.

Jungkook nods at him and continues speaking.

“Jimin doesn’t have anyone he doesn’t get along with. He has many friends. And he isn’t in debt, he works hard to make sure he always spends within his means. He studies on a partial scholarship,” Jungkook continues. “But lately, he’s been very scared. Yoongi-ssi can also confirm this. He wouldn’t tell us what it was because he was scared we’d leave him. But in the past few weeks, he’s been terrified about something.”

“What do you mean by terrified?”

“Panic attacks, bursting into tears. He wouldn’t be able to talk at times and wouldn’t want to be left alone, was terrified even at the idea of it. We tried but we weren’t able to pry it out of him. He wasn’t like this before. It definitely has something to do with this,” Jungkook answers, the words half rambled in his hurry to get them out. “It worsened over the past few days. He just kept saying that he couldn’t tell us what it was because he was scared.”

The officer nods.

“We’ll need to focus on that. I’ll register the report tonight, once we hit 24 hours from the incident. Until then I’ll file this as a break and enter with damage to commercial property.”

It wraps up then, and the franchise owner averts her eyes as she leaves. The security officer gives them both a sympathetic smile and tells them that he hopes they find Jimin soon.

Officer Song moves to leave too, but instead decides to approach Yoongi and Jungkook where they stand outside, underneath the stark sunlight. The rest of his team head toward their cars.

“I know you’re his brother,” he says, looking at Yoongi. His gaze then travels to Jungkook. “But what are you? Are you his friend?”

“I’m his boyfriend. We live together,” Jungkook answers unflinchingly. The other man pauses, raising an eyebrow.

“Boyfriend?”

“Yes, we are dating. We’ve been together for 8 months now.”

“Oh,” he responds awkwardly, clearing his throat. “I see.”

“Is that a problem?” Yoongi asks, voice flat. Jungkook also stares, seeming defensive, his face hard.

“It doesn’t concern me. I just needed to understand the relationship,” The officer responds eventually. “And it does open up the door to several new possibilities, if there was someone against your community. Hatred manifests quite violently in these cases. Hang in there, and get some rest, the two of you. We’ll be in touch.”

Jungkook just nods in response. Officer Song nods back, and then he leaves too. The cafe’s now secured with tape, and they see people out and about staring at the scene as they walk by. It’s morning now, and mostly everyone’s on their way to school or work. Before they leave, Yoongi takes a picture of one of the footprints on the ground.

It’s awkward then. Jungkook gestures for Yoongi to follow him, and he does. They walk silently for around twenty minutes. Yoongi’s bones ache, and his eyes burn. This all feels wrong. Wrong in the most unsettling way, because everything that’s happened over the past 12 hours seems to require an inordinate amount of time and effort for his mind to process.

Jungkook, who usually seems to chatter quite a bit whenever in his presence, is dead silent too. His posture is stiff.

They walk till they reach Jimin and Jungkook's apartment building. It's a quaint 4 storey structure with a narrow but clean stairwell, obviously recently constructed. It's not Yoongi's first time coming here, but it might as well be considering the last time he'd been here he hadn't been able to really focus on his surroundings. His mind was still bowled over with the knowledge that his Jimin now had a boyfriend, someone new in his life.

Now, Yoongi takes his time as they head upstairs. He imagines Jimin climbing up and down these stairs every day. Wonders if he'd eaten well in the mornings, whether he was tired on his way back home. He wants to find Jimin so he can ask him.

Yoongi waits silently as Jungkook gets the door open, and they step in. The other boy toes his shoes off and then turns around awkwardly to face him.

"I'll turn on the water heater for you in case you'd like to shower, it'll take around 20 minutes. If you'd like to rest, you can take the bedroom. And let me know if you're hungry, there's some fried rice in the fridge. I'll heat it up for you."

Yoongi suspects he's tired, or doesn't want to talk, because Jungkook silently flips on the geyser switch and goes to sit on the couch. He leans forward, elbows resting on his knees, and buries his face into his hands.

Yoongi removes his shoes as well. He breathes in the faint fragrance of vanilla, and his eyes knowingly drift over the space until they land on a half melted vanilla scented candle sitting on a shelf. Classic Jimin things.

The whole apartment, small yet cosy, feels laced with the scent and presence of Jimin. There's Jimin everywhere. In the crocheted coasters he can see in the kitchen, to the cute hanging plants in their little balcony. The multicoloured cotton candy throw draped over the couch, to the small faux flower placed on their little dining table.

Yoongi goes to the bedroom. The double bed is made but the thick duvet is wrinkled, worn and soft. There are fairy lights strung over the headboard, twining up and across the wall, pictures suspended from the wire. Yoongi can spot himself in several of them, as well as many different faces and friends. There are framed pictures on the wall of Jimin and Jungkook. Yoongi lets his eyes trail over every single one. A selfie of the two of them at some park, one of Jungkook hugging Jimin from behind at some party. There's one of Jimin asleep in Jungkook's lap, his head tucked into his neck, obviously clicked by a friend. Jungkook beams at the camera, his cheeks pink, arms wrapped protectively and tight around Jimin's waist.

It feels like he's looking at someone else. There used to be a time when Yoongi was the only person in Jimin's life. Now, his baby brother has a whole universe outside of him and their simple memories. He can't quite recognize any of his friends, whereas in the past, he knew everything there was to know about Jimin's life.

It's only natural. Everyone grows up. He certainly did. But still, there's a certain sadness that casts a shadow over him at that moment. His mind drifts to the memory of Jimin holding his hand as they walked in the sun, talking about anything and everything. Simpler, happier times. When simply living seemed to be the only task they had. And all that mattered was that they had each other.

It's strange, the idea that Yoongi can't talk to Jimin right now. That he can't just pick up his phone and dial his number, find him on the other side. That he can't simply outstretch his hand and feel Jimin's little fingers darting out immediately to intertwine with his, holding on tightly, never wanting to let go.

"Hyung, the water should be hot now." Jungkook's voice calls, snapping Yoongi out of his melancholic train of thought. The other boy stands by the doorway, and he seems worn out.

"Okay."

Jungkook hands him a towel and then gives him quick instructions on how to operate the shower before he leaves.

Yoongi showers, but he's not really paying attention as he does. All that occupies his mind is Jimin. Where is he right now? Is he hurt? Who could have done this? It feels like there's so

much left unknown.

He steps out of the shower when he's done, drying up and quickly changing into a new set of fresh clothes he'd brought with him. He's only bought 4 changes. He'll need to get more if Jimin isn't found in the next few days.

Yoongi isn't leaving till he finds him.

The moment he's changed, he opens the door and walks into the living room to talk to Jungkook. The other boy is as he was left last, still silently pondering the same things he was, although the sadness is cast more heavily over his features.

Yoongi's eyes drift to Jungkook's phone on the coffee table. The device rests there, unassuming. Jungkook doesn't seem to be doing very well, if his red rimmed eyes and clenched jaw are anything to go by.

Yoongi is wary. He can't trust anyone at this point. He certainly doesn't trust Jungkook. It all feels a little too convenient, that he just happened to be the only one at the scene, and didn't see anything. That he just happened to not be able to hear Jimin over the phone. And that he just happened to be the only one around Jimin when he'd shattered mentally.

"Hey," Yoongi says. "Can I take you up on that fried rice?"

Jungkook looks up and nods.

"Sure. Let me just go heat it up."

He stands, shuffling over to the kitchen.

The moment he walks out of the living room, Yoongi sits down and snatches his phone. He huffs a laugh when he sees there's no passcode, and immediately starts to snoop.

The noise of the microwave whirring sounds out, and the clatter of cutlery.

Jungkook's call logs match what he said; there's only one call from Jimin last night at around 11:30, and after that there's only the calls to the police and then to him. His messages are the same too, and Yoongi checks his chat log with Jimin. Just gag worthy lovey dovey messages.

Yoongi hears Jungkook start to rinse the cutlery, and decides to hurry.

His image gallery is just screenshots of class material, photos of food, progress photos from the gym and tons of pictures of Jimin. There are shots of him smiling before plates of food, one of him sleeping against Jungkook's shoulder, another of Jimin laughing.

The microwave beeps, and Yoongi quickly closes all the tabs and returns Jungkook's phone to its original place.

There was nothing in there. But still, Yoongi's going to keep his guard up.

Jungkook emerges with a steaming bowl of fried rice which he sets down onto one of the coasters on the coffee table, handing him a set of chopsticks.

"Thanks," Yoongi says.

"You're welcome," Jungkook responds quietly.

Yoongi starts to eat silently, although he's not really hungry. It was just an excuse to get Jungkook out of the room.

“I really thought he’d be here,” Jungkook reveals then. “I was clinging onto the hope that he’d just run all the way home, and that he’d be here waiting for us. The three of us were supposed to have dinner last night.”

Yoongi listens.

“Hyung, we’ll have to work together. I know you don’t like me, but….we have to find him. We can’t just sit here doing nothing and wait for the police…we won’t disturb their investigation but we should try, right? We have to try, we can’t just sit idle while Jimin is out there waiting for us…”

“We aren’t going to sit idle. Did Jimin mention something about anyone who upset him, or who he was scared of?” Yoongi asks, opting to ignore Jungkook’s comment about him not liking him. “Anyone who could provoke this sort of reaction from him.”

Jungkook stops to think.

“Other than his ex-boyfriend, there wasn’t really anyone who upset him. But that was also a while ago, so I’m not sure about-”

“Ex boyfriend?” Yoongi interrupts, his eyebrows furrowing immediately.

“Yeah,” Jungkook answers, frowning too. “The guy he was with before me. Just a little over a year ago.”

The news feels like a slap across his face, burning with a vicious singe. Yoongi can feel his heart rate increase, his mouth dry where it hangs open. A part of him wants to just go along with what Jungkook’s saying, pretend that he knew about this. That Jimin didn’t hide something like this from him. For his pride. But he can’t, because the feeling of his heart breaking seems to override anything else.

“No…no, *you’re* Jimin’s first boyfriend,” Yoongi insists, even if he seems like a fool, his voice firm. “He hasn’t dated anyone before you.”

“That’s not true. I’m sorry. I thought you knew,” Jungkook responds. “Maybe he was too nervous to tell you. I know it wasn’t a good relationship, which is why I brought it up in the first place.”

“What do you mean?”

“He cheated on Jimin.”

Yoongi listens, his eyes hard. His blood boils, and he sits there with clenched fists.

“Jimin would have nightmares about it…and he’d had poor mental health because of it. We’d started living together pretty soon after it ended I think, and I could see how it affected him every day. It got much better once we started dating, but it had a very big impact on him… when I first told him I liked him, he genuinely believed that I was lying and would sleep with other people behind his back. Whoever he dated was a real asshole.”

“He didn’t tell me this. I didn’t know about it,” Yoongi announces, feeling stupid. Jimin had his first heartbreak, and endured it all on his own. Yoongi’s heart breaks at not being trusted, and it makes him wonder why. Was he not a good hyung to Jimin? Did Jimin not feel safe around him? How did he keep something so big from him….and how did Yoongi not notice, or realize? He’s been so busy over the past few years…

“If he didn’t tell you, there probably was a reason,” Jungkook says softly. “He usually never wants to keep anything from you. He never really wanted to talk about it much with me either, he just happened to tell me once we got close enough, and in sparing detail.”

Even if that may be true, Yoongi isn’t sure he can handle so many things happening and being revealed in such close proximity. Jimin’s gone…he apparently had a boyfriend and was hurt…and was hiding things from the both of them. Why?

“Who was he? What’s his name?” Yoongi asks. He’ll pay him a visit.

“I don’t know. Jimin never wanted to talk about it, and I didn’t push because I didn’t want to force him.”

Yoongi has a bad feeling about this.

“We need to find him.”

-

In the evening, once it crosses 24 hours since Jimin’s disappearance, Yoongi and Jungkook are called into the police station to file a missing report.

They take the bus, sitting silently next to each other. And then walk with silence surrounding them to the station too. There’s no need for conversation between them, and Yoongi is glad that Jungkook doesn’t push.

The process is complicated, yet surprisingly simple at the same time. It feels weird, having to choose pictures of Jimin to submit to the authorities. And listing out his physical attributes. Brown eyes, crooked tooth, tiny mole underneath his eye, lilac hair. His height, and his blood type, and what he was wearing when he was last seen. They have to answer questions about drug and alcohol abuse.

To know that now, Jimin is officially considered *missing*. Now part of a database of cases, a fraction of which ever get solved, and even fewer with the concerned people alive.

And immediately, they’re asked to submit alibis. Yoongi says that he was on his bus, and Jungkook says the same. They’re informed that the police will need time to verify both claims, mostly Jungkook’s, because Yoongi’s bus ETA was after Jimin disappeared.

Disappeared. It's a heavy, heavy word.

It's on their way out that Yoongi tells Jungkook that he'll meet him outside. He walks till he finds a half secluded corner, leaning against the marble wall.

He takes out his phone, looking at his mother's contact. Now that it's official, he'll have to tell their parents. Yoongi's throat is heavy.

He dials before he can think too much, listening to the beep of it ringing.

"Hello? Yoongi-ah?"

"Hi, mom," Yoongi responds. "Is this a good time to talk?"

"Of course. I just got home from work, I'm heating up dinner. How's Jiminie? Did you make it to Seoul alright? Your father and I haven't heard from him in ages, please scold him for me-"

"Mom, he's missing," Yoongi blurts out. "I'm at the police station right now. He disappeared from the cafe he works at last night."

"Last night? Disappeared where? Where'd he run off to?" His mom answers immediately, her voice seeming sharper.

"The police think he's been kidnapped…I…I'm gonna stay here till I find him. I have Jungkook, Jimin's boyfriend with me too. We'll find him, so don't worry."

"Oh god," his mother gasps. Yoongi presses his eyes shut. "*Oh my god, where is he? My baby, where is he?"*

“I’ll find him,” Yoongi repeats, although it mostly seems like he’s assuring himself.

“Your father’s still at work…what do we do?” Her voice is panicked.

“I’ll handle it. Don’t worry.”

“You always have, Yoongi-ah. Sometimes I’m sorry…we never let you be a child.”

“We did what we had to to get by. It’s fine,” Yoongi responds. Whatever he did, he did happily.

“We need him b-back. He has to be okay. Your father can’t take time off but maybe I can, I’ll come-”

“No, it’s fine. I promise I’ll handle it. I’ll find him. Don’t worry, mom,” Yoongi insists.

“My Jiminie…”

“Tell Dad when he gets home. I have to go now. I’ll let you know as soon as I hear anything.”

“*Okay*.”

“Bye, Mom. Jiminie will be fine. Don’t worry.”

Yoongi ends the call then, taking in a few heavy breaths. Over the past 24 hours, he feels like he’s just been going through everything on autopilot. He doesn’t stop to let himself think

about any of it. He has to be strong, just like he's always been. Because Jimin is somewhere far away from him, and he needs Yoongi to be level headed rather than panic.

He walks out of the station then, finally regrouping with Jungkook who was waiting for him outside.

Jungkook nods at him in greeting, but doesn't ask what he was doing inside. Yoongi doesn't offer the information either.

All he thinks about on the way back to the apartment is Jimin's ex boyfriend. Someone who broke his heart, and inflicted enough emotional damage that Jimin was visibly down for a while. It must've been bad if he didn't tell Yoongi, but maybe he didn't tell him because he just wasn't trustworthy…maybe Jimin didn't feel safe enough with him. His mind drifts to the memory of Jimin being scared to the point of hysterics when he'd yelled at him over the phone, only realizing what he'd done after Jungkook pointed it out. Yoongi wasn't very reliable then, so it's no surprise that…

Yoongi and Jungkook head up the stairs together, and silently enter the apartment.

"You can have the bed," Jungkook says.

"It's your house-"

"It's what Jimin would've wanted too. It doesn't matter, this is where I used to sleep before we started dating, by my own choice," Jungkook responds. "Really, it's not a big deal."

Yoongi doesn't respond, and Jungkook doesn't linger either. He's quick to disappear then, and Yoongi shuts the door of the bedroom behind him. He doesn't think he would've ever offered Jungkook the same courtesy.

But it is beneficial, he supposes. Yoongi now has unbarred access to Jimin and Jungkook's private area, the place with the highest likelihood of having hints and clues. His eyes drift

over the space, analyzing the study desk and storage units. Everything in the apartment is cluttered, but in an organized way that doesn't look messy. It just looks lived in, like it's full of love and like the space has welcomed lots of happy memories in the past.

Yoongi walks over to the study desk. He looks at the textbooks on top, flips through them. Nothing except the odd flashcards of messily scrawled notes and reminder post-its. The stationery caddy holds exactly that; stationery. And the space underneath is empty too.

Yoongi sighs, then heads over to the wardrobe. Upon opening it, he sees the neat compartmentalization of Jimin and Jungkook's clothes. Jimin's clothes seem to take around 3 shelves and most of the hanger space, while Jungkook's, mostly tones of black, white, and grey, all seem to be folded neatly on a single shelf. They all smell like the same fabric softener. Yoongi thinks he remembers Jimin saying something about Jungkook enjoying doing their laundry. Jimin never liked doing their laundry at home either, it was always Yoongi's duty.

It doesn't bother him that this is a major invasion of Jungkook's privacy, and him taking advantage of the other man's trust. If it's necessary for him to do this for him to find even a sliver of a hint that could lead him to finding Jimin, he will. Without a smidge of doubt, or hesitation.

The last thing Yoongi checks is the bedside table. The first drawer reveals some night creams, essential oils, and an eye mask, along with a spare charger.

And the second drawer, the one at the bottom, opens up for Yoongi to find a half empty bottle of lube. His face falls flat, and he shuts it immediately. He doesn't want to think about it.

Eventually, he sighs with defeat, staring at the picture of him and Jimin hanging on the wall. Right now, the two of them, Yoongi and Jungkook, are getting ready to go to sleep, call it a day. Yoongi wonders if Jimin is able to do the same right now, or if he's hurt. He stares at his smiling face in the photograph, immortal in the memory, able to recall the day it was clicked like the back of his hand. It's from Jimin's 15th birthday, when their family had gone out for dinner to celebrate and Yoongi had gifted Jimin a massive stuffed baby chick. He's hugging it in the picture, and Yoongi has his arms wrapped around both Jimin and the toy.

Yoongi closes his eyes and tries to see if he can read Jimin's thoughts, a desperate last resort based on a childish belief they had when they were younger that they were connected telepathically. Jimin would always say that Yoongi could read his mind, but in reality, Jimin was always just very easy to predict back then. If he pouted, no matter what it was, it was always an issue that could be remedied by handing Jimin a sweet. If Jimin smiled, the type where his eyes glinted, it meant that he had done something naughty. And if his lower lip jutted out and wobbled, and his body curved inward, it meant that he was sad and hiding something. Yoongi knew him well enough to decode every little bit of his expressions and body language. He was just so easy to read, and Yoongi didn't have the heart to tell Jimin that he was simply as clear as day, rather than it being his telepathic abilities.

But now, he feels desperate enough to try it himself. To just hope, that if he tries hard enough, he'll be able to see and hear Jimin's thoughts.

"Where are you?" He whispers. "Where are you, Jiminie? Please tell me."

Yoongi's throat is heavy as he waits hopefully. For an epiphany, or for Jimin's voice or face to appear in his head.

All that greets him is the sudden crack of thunder and the rash downpour of rain. The rain that took Jimin to begin with, snatched him out of Yoongi's clutches the moment he'd curled his fingers to grasp him.

Yoongi opens his eyes, looking out of the window. It's pouring, and he can see the boundless cityscape and tops of buildings. It goes on and on, no end in sight. The message is clear.

Jimin could be anywhere. Anywhere at all. He could be in any one of the millions of little windows he can see right now. And it's up to Yoongi to find him. Life won't make it easy by handing him answers, it never has.

The night progresses, although neither Yoongi nor Jungkook manage to sleep a wink.

The silence haunts them all the same.

And all Yoongi can think about is the last time he'd hugged Jimin, or seen his smile in person, and when he'd be able to do it all again.

Chapter End Notes

Yoongi and Jungkook???? SURPRISE detective duo??????????????????//////

And that's the 13th chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 14: Long Run

Chapter Notes

Here's the fourteenth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Yoongi grew old enough to be able to speak clearly, follow instructions smoothly, and think with a rational mind, his parents taught him how to be an adult.

He'd been just 5 or 6. His father taught him how to slice veggies and his mother taught him how to check whether fish or chicken were cooked. When he grew old enough to understand how to not burn his little fingers on hot pots and pans, and how to season food to get the perfect flavour, cooking became a task that fell on his shoulders. So did loading the washing machine and little errands around the home.

It was just an unfortunate yet unavoidable situation. Their father was not making enough to sustain meals and ends for 4 people, especially since Jimin was born with fragile health. He'd

had poor health for the majority of the first decade of his life, falling sick at just about everything and anything, needing to go to the hospital every time his temperature so much as inched over the normal degree. It was a well-known drill for their family; measure Jiminie's temperature, check his breathing levels, and bundle him up and rush him to the emergency room before his vitals dipped too low.

Jimin needed nutritious, home-cooked food. But their parents also needed to work, because the stream of incoming money dwindled too thin to be able to sustain groceries, doctor visits and the mountain of one-off expenses.

So the responsibility of taking care of the home, and Jimin, became Yoongi's responsibility.

Most children would complain. It was too much of a burden for a child whose priorities would usually lie in little more than video games, sweets, and playing outside.

But Yoongi didn't mind one bit. He grew to like cooking, and he grew to enjoy doing laundry and cleaning the house. He was gifted with a good memory and a sharp mind, so he never needed to spend too much time on schoolwork. But still, his days were full. It should've felt heavy, and cumbersome, but it didn't.

Because it was Jimin.

Most of the kids in Yoongi's class would complain about how annoying their siblings were, and how they wished they were only children. To not have to share toys and rooms, as well as the attention of their parents. Yoongi was the only one who adored having a sibling.

Jimin was just so cute. And sweet too, not a single impolite or vindictive bone in his body. He'd always want to help Yoongi, looking up to his hyung, and Yoongi, as he cooked, would give him a little plastic knife which Jimin would use to chop soft bananas for them to have for dessert. Jimin would swing his little legs and squeal with excitement whenever Yoongi would set the table, waiting to eat whatever delicious food he'd made. He'd help Yoongi mop the house even if there was no strength to the way he'd bring the mop to the floor, and he'd haphazardly fold their clothes because he wanted to be a part of it all. He wanted to help, always wanted to be *included*, and there was no room in Yoongi's heart for bitterness to fester and spread.

He was a little star in Yoongi's life. A bundle of laughter and love and light. A purpose.

No matter how difficult it was, Yoongi is thankful for the formative years they got to spend together. Wouldn't have it any other way, no matter the scary nights spent alone during thunderstorms or when faced with issues the both of them were too young to solve. He'll never forget the memories they have. Helping Jimin with homework, falling asleep together after reading the same story book every night, watching movies and playing, trying out fun new recipes and developing a bond so strong nothing could break it. For a long time, all they had was each other.

To this day, Jimin is still all Yoongi has. He has friends, even had a few relationships along the way, but Jimin was and is always the most important person to him. Someone worth living for. They had their own little word for the longest time, until time came knocking and forced them down separate paths. If Yoongi could do it all over again, he would.

It just hurts so much when Yoongi introduces himself to Jimin's supposed best friend Hyora, only to find that she hasn't a clue who he is. Like he isn't an overt part of Jimin.

Or perhaps, he isn't anymore.

"Uh, this is Jimin's older brother. Yoongi."

"Oh, hi," she greets, bowing her head. "Sorry, I've just never seen your face before. Jimin's mentioned you loads of times but we've never been introduced. I'm Hyora."

It doesn't assuage the sting. The three of them are sitting at a cafe, the air thick and tense between them. Jungkook had called her here, because Yoongi has decided that talking to everyone who knows Jimin is the best way to find hints and clues.

"Do you know who Jimin's ex boyfriend is?" Yoongi asks, cutting to the chase.

“Ex boyfriend?” Hyora frowns. “Isn’t Jungkookie the only one?”

“No,” Jungkook responds, mouth pressed in a tight line. “There was someone before me. During our first year.”

“No there wasn’t.”

“Yes, Hyora. There was.” Jungkook’s voice is flat, to the point. He’s picking at his nails, eyes dull.

Yoongi sighs. Hyora frowns, huffing.

“Okay, then,” she says curtly. “If you know more than I do, why did you even bother asking me in the first place? Trying to rub it in that you know him better than I do? Where’s Jiminie, anyway? Let’s just ask him ourselves and settle this-”

“Did you not see the university notice board?” Jungkook asks, looking up at her. She shakes her head.

“No. I’ve been sick the last 2 days. No one checks the notices anyway-”

“He’s missing. We don’t know where he is.”

“What?” She snaps.

“Yeah. So you need to tell us right now if you know anything,” Jungkook says, handing her his phone where she can see the notice on the online bulletin. It’s got a mockup of the details they gave the police, and the university has listed Jungkook and Yoongi’s numbers as contacts for those who have information.

She snatches the phone, her eyes sharp as she takes in all of the information.

“For how long? He hasn’t been answering my messages for a week now. I assumed it was because of assignments because he does tend to go off the radar when things get busy…”

Jungkook takes it upon himself to explain the situation to her. Yoongi observes her body language and reaction to his words extremely carefully. What he finds is immediate surprise and tears that would require an inordinate amount of effort to well up on the fly, as well as raw panic in her eyes. Her mouth clamps shut, and she seems to be thinking hard, eyebrows furrowed and knuckles white where they’re clenched into fists.

Eventually, she speaks.

“When I first met Jimin…back during orientation week…we’d all gone out to barbecue on our first day. It was a dinner hosted by our seniors,” she starts, her words slightly urged. “Jimin and I had sat together, and a senior asked him if he was single. He had said no, at that time.”

Yoongi listens, staring.

“But when I asked him about it the next day, he said that he would only be able to answer my question properly in a little while. And eventually, he said that he wasn’t dating anyone. I just wrote it off as a joke, or an excuse he gave our seniors because they were really pestering him…”

“So he said he was dating someone and then said he wasn’t?” Jungkook asks.

Hyora nods. “But it could’ve been because he was drunk or felt pressured the first night because of our seniors, like I said. But Jiminie doesn’t really drink in the first place, nor did he drink that night now that I think about it…”

“He didn’t tell you anything else about this guy,” Yoongi questions, although it mostly comes out as a flat statement.

“He had just said that he was in a serious relationship, that’s what he told us that night. I still remember it so clearly because of the way he’d backtracked on it later. And when he went back on his words, he almost seemed afraid. He just wanted to change the topic.”

“Afraid? Afraid how?”

“Like he’d said something he wasn’t supposed to say.”

Yoongi thinks. Serious relationship. Someone who Jimin couldn’t talk about.

“He was probably closeted, this ex,” Yoongi deduces. “Didn’t want Jimin outing him.”

“Who would want to hide Jimin…” Jungkook mumbles under his breath, sagging back against his chair.

“Not everyone’s as brave as you are, Jungkook,” Hyora responds. “It wasn’t easy for Jimin to tell us he was gay in the first place, I know he struggled a lot in school.”

“What did he tell you?” Yoongi asks, looking up at her.

“No one wanted to be friends with him. He said he’d had to deal with snide remarks and the occasional hazing, and he’d always be lonely.”

It’s true. Yoongi remembers every bit of it. Jimin had been so excited to start high school, and had spent so long getting ready to look nice and make friends. Only for Yoongi to see Jimin at the end of the school day looking more dejected and upset than he’d ever been.

He never had friends, and it wasn't for a personality fault. People just weren't tolerant, and Jimin was open about who he was right from day one. Yoongi protected him as much as he could.

"Do you know any boy who was close to Jimin during your first year? And then suddenly not?" Yoongi prods. "That could be the person. It could really be anyone, if they weren't open about the relationship."

"I can't think of anyone who it could be," Hyora responds, seeming slightly exasperated. "But there were many times Jimin would ditch plans and leave campus, only to return the next morning. He was with someone but he wouldn't tell us who, just that it was a friend. They probably stay off campus or don't even go to our school."

"Who is this motherfucker," Yoongi mutters under his breath, perplexed. The situation seems to get eerier with every passing second. He's livid that some closeted coward strung along his brother and broke his heart. He now understands why Jimin didn't tell him, or anyone for that matter.

But who really was this guy? Some loser? A creepy old man? Or something as simple as a classmate?

Yoongi's mind flashes to the lingerie he found in Jimin's closet all those years ago.

"What is it, hyung?" Jungkook asks, looking at him.

"Uh, back when we were still in school," Yoongi starts. "I'd found a gift for Jimin in his closet. There was a note in there which seemed like it came from someone he was dating."

"What kind of gift?" Hyora questions. "It could've been from a friend."

Yoongi clears his throat. Jungkook stares, waiting for him to answer the question.

“It was lingerie. For women. But there was also a collar with his name on it…so I knew it was meant for him. And it looked really expensive. You know how you just have that sense that tells you something’s wrong? That’s exactly what I’d felt. He told me he’d bought it for himself but I knew he was lying. Mostly because of the card, which was written in a handwriting I couldn’t recognize. It made me want to throw up because I thought there was a creep taking advantage of him. We had a massive fight, and I explained how dangerous all of this could be. He told me that I didn’t have anything to worry about and promised that he wasn’t doing anything stupid, and that was the last we spoke of it. I looked at his phone too but couldn’t find anything. Nothing happened after that.”

“Were there rich people in your school?” Hyora asks.

“Plenty.”

“But that was also back in your hometown. This ex happened in Seoul, right?” Jungkook asks. He still seems to be reeling from Yoongi’s news.

“Yes. But at this point, I don’t know anything anymore,” Yoongi sighs. “Everything is worth considering and looking into.”

Their conversation comes to a halt when one of the baristas in the cafe turns up the volume of the TV fixed into the upper corner of the space. The title *breaking news* is splashed in big, garish red letters, and the newsreader looks frazzled.

All of their heads snap up to the screen, Yoongi straightening up.

“Senator Oh Soojin’s son Oh Yoonbeom was found shot to death in Gangnam-gu along with his personal assistant and driver early this morning. Authorities estimate that the three were attacked sometime last night between the hours of-”

“That corrupt asshole’s son?” Hyora scoffs. “Good riddance. He was a huge pervert.”

A few people look toward their table, disapproving of Hyora's comment. Yoongi looks down at his hands resting on his lap, uninterested for the most part. His mind is only on Jimin, and the total befuddlement and despair he feels about this whole situation. He isn't stupid, he knows that the possibilities of a safe rescue grow bleaker with each day that passes.

How did Jimin, someone without a single bad iota in his body, be handed such a fate? What did he do to deserve this?

What could Yoongi have done to stop this?

He startles when he feels a hand rest gently over his. Looking up, his eyes meet Hyora's.

"We'll find him," she says, and it sounds like a promise although her eyes are wet. "We just have to keep digging till we hit gold."

Yoongi nods, and his eyes catch Jungkook's.

Jungkook stares at him, although his eyes still hold a cold sort of fear that's been there ever since Yoongi saw him that night. His lips are chapped, skin clammy and pale. When Yoongi looks at his hands that rest on the table, he sees that Jungkook's cuticles are picked raw. The bags under his eyes are clear as day.

The news segment continues to blare through the cafe, volume set at the highest.

Yoongi doesn't give a fuck about Senator Oh's son. He knows that this is all anyone and everyone will be able to talk about for a good while.

While…no one talks about Jimin.

Yoongi's nudged once more by Hyora. He looks up at her, raising an eyebrow.

"You said he ended it last year, right?" She asks.

"Yeah," Jungkook responds.

"I'm not sure about this…but last year, Jiminie went off the radar for nearly a month. He said it was medical leave and all of our professors let him submit his assignments and submissions online, which they never usually do. They only did it because he's otherwise an exemplary student. When he'd come back, it was almost like he was a completely different person…"

Yoongi listens, Hyora continues.

"He wouldn't answer video calls, and refused to let us come see him. He was never at his dorm, and the few times he was he refused to open the door."

"What do you mean by a completely different person?" Jungkook asks.

"He was miserable. He didn't laugh or smile anymore, and he always looked like he'd just cried. He never wanted to hang out or do anything, and he'd have these bouts of long-stretching silence where none of us would be able to get through to him. He wouldn't eat… and it was obvious that he wasn't sleeping…he wouldn't say anything no matter how much I tried to get it out of him…I assumed it was family trouble so I didn't push but now that we know something else was off…"

"Give me a date of when this happened." Yoongi's voice is firm, his mind moving at a mile a minute.

"I can't give you an exact one right now…I'll have to check our old texts and-"

Yoongi yanks his phone out of his pocket, searching his chat with Jimin using different keywords until he stops at around 15 months ago, when Jimin said he'd broken his phone and couldn't talk.

"Was it last April?" He asks, voice urged.

"It could've been," Hyora responds, her eyes trained on her phone screen as she combs through her phone. "Yes. It was," she eventually answers. "I asked him why he didn't show up to class. This was the first day of the month he was gone. 13th April."

Yoongi leans back against his chair, thinking. Why did Jimin hide so much? He'd told Yoongi that he'd dropped and damaged his phone…

"That's definitely when they broke up," he concludes. Jimin suffered alone. He forced himself to go through that alone. Yoongi's head reels, speechless at all the gaps in this story.

"We need to talk to more people," Jungkook says. "We have to find this guy."

Yoongi doesn't respond, but he agrees. The rest of the cafe continues to pay attention to the news segment, eyes trained on the TV.

There's only one thought echoing through his brain.

Where are you?

-

The door shuts behind Yoongi once they return to the apartment, the air inside slowly yet surely losing the light scent of vanilla it had earlier. The sun shines in through the windows, and Yoongi can see the specks of dust catching the light as they float through the space.

Jungkook toes his boots off and heads inside, once again sitting on the sofa.

“I’m going to try to find the contact details for Jimin’s old roommate. In case he knows anything,” he announces although he’s looking at the floor, his voice dull.

Yoongi stares at him, eyes narrow and suddenly cold.

“Why didn’t you push more?” He asks. He’s still standing in the foyer, sneakers still on. The jacket slung over his shoulders feels like it needs a wash, having withstood the bus journey here and nearly every outing since.

Jungkook looks up, inquisitive.

“I’m sorry, hyung? What do you mean?”

“Don’t call me hyung. I told you not to call me that. We aren’t close,” Yoongi reprimands, face steeling further when he sees Jungkook stiffen in response, his mouth pressing into a thin line. “I’m asking you why you didn’t push Jimin for more answers. You should have. If you had, we wouldn’t be in this situation right now.”

Jungkook seems nearly speechless. Yoongi doesn’t break his gaze, still staring at him. This is a test; to see and analyze how Jungkook reacts, to rule him out or confirm as a possible suspect. But if he’s being honest, that’s not the only reason. He’s also been feeling jumpy for a while now, and has been itching to let Jungkook have it.

“The most important part of a relationship is respect, and part of that is respecting your partner’s boundaries.” Jungkook’s response is calm and well-articulated, but Yoongi doesn’t want to hear it.

“No, the most important part of a relationship is making sure they are safe and always with you, which you failed at,” Yoongi responds coldly.

“I don’t know what you want me to say,” Jungkook responds, standing up. “I know you’re upset. But don’t discount my feelings. I’m sorry to say this but your strategy wasn’t the best, either. You just yelled at him, scared him, and made him cry; no matter the fact that your intention was to help him. Keeping check of your emotions is equally important. I won’t budge on that. I wanted Jimin to feel safe with me, and that he wouldn’t be met with anger or judgement if and when he chose to tell me everything.”

“And where did that get you?” Yoongi demands. “You were the one actually here with him. You were the *only* one who could’ve figured it out, because you were together all the time.”

“No matter the situation, I would never want Jimin to be scared of me.”

“Do you feel the same way even now?”

“Yes,” Jungkook responds unflinchingly. “I will find him.”

Yoongi laughs cruelly, huffing a breath. Jungkook doesn’t respond, still staring at him with a straight face.

“Why are you picking a fight with me?” He asks.

“I’m asking valid questions.”

“Questions which won’t help the situation. Sure, I could’ve pushed a little more. But if you didn’t scare him, perhaps he would’ve told you. We both know how close he is to you. We both had our faults in the way we handled this. What matters now is finding him, not fighting with each other.”

Yoongi knows Jungkook is right. Whatever this is, this argument, it's just wasting time. He knows.

"I know you don't like me. But right now, there are bigger things at stake than you and me." Jungkook's voice is flat and to the point.

Yoongi must take too long to respond because Jungkook continues to speak, heading toward the foyer.

"I'll let you have some space. I'm gonna go to the dorm and check if they have Jimin's roommate's contact details," he says, slipping on his shoes right next to Yoongi, not sparing him a single glance.

Jungkook leaves then, and it all feels rather abrupt. Yoongi can hear him bound down the stairs, the noises echoing through the stairwell, audible through the front door.

It takes Yoongi a minute and a half for his brain to get back on track, and he rushes to pull on his boots on too. He slams the door shut behind him as he hurries downstairs, easily spotting Jungkook brisk walking down the road.

Yoongi follows, keeping a careful distance away.

If he's flustered Jungkook, it's possible that the other boy will attempt to cover up his tracks if he's responsible for all this. Or do some sort of damage control, or have loose ends to tie up now that he's alone. Yoongi needs to observe him when he thinks that no one is watching him.

Jungkook ends up going straight to their campus. Yoongi follows, his eyes trailing all over the lush lawns, nice buildings and lots of signs that point out directions to a host of amenities. He's only just now visiting Jimin's university. He knows that most of his own classmates, and most of Jimin's, had their parents or other family come down to help them settle in.

Neither of them had that. He feels sorry. He wonders if Jimin found it difficult to move in and handle all the paperwork alone, whether he felt lost without any semblance of familiarity. While Yoongi always had to make do with only himself to rely on for things like this, he never let Jimin feel a single smidge of responsibility until he moved away. He couldn't be there for Jimin; strict rules about attendance, plus his part time jobs kept him tied down.

Now, he wonders if any of it was worth it. Worth losing out on being part of a key memory and milestone in Jimin's life.

The thoughts rattle their way through his brain with abandon, as Yoongi watches Jungkook enter a building that looks to be their old dorm.

Huh. He did just as he said he would.

Yoongi approaches, standing behind a wall attached to the entrance. He can just barely hear Jungkook's voice.

"Excuse me, could you please share the name and contact information of the resident of room 320 last year?"

Yoongi can't hear the response of the receptionist, but he does catch Jungkook's next words.

"I know you're not supposed to give out personal information, but I need it urgently. It's for the missing case of Park Jimin who also used to live in that room. Have you seen the notice? I'm not a stranger, I lived here myself last year. He could have valuable information that we desperately need right now."

Yoongi hears the rapid and impatient voice of the receptionist shoot back in response, although his words are essentially inaudible considering the all round chatter of the students filing in and out of the building.

“Okay, I understand.” He hears Jungkook eventually say before he sees the other boy exit the dorm building, continuing to walk through campus. Yoongi follows, still cautious.

He follows till he sees Jungkook slow down to a stop in the middle of the path and sit down on a bench.

Yoongi watches as Jungkook buries his face in his hands and promptly starts crying.

People stare at Jungkook as they walk by him. He’s not sobbing loudly, but the slight shaking of his shoulders and his wet red eyes that peek out between his fingers make it extremely obvious.

Yoongi clears his throat, feeling uncomfortable. He wonders why Jungkook is crying in public.

But then he realizes that it’s probably because he doesn’t want to cry in front of Yoongi, who is currently inhabiting his only private space.

Jungkook cries for a while, and Yoongi wonders whether it’s out of guilt for something he’s done, or if it’s because he simply just loves Jimin so much.

When he’d first come down to surprise Jimin for his birthday nearly a year ago, he’d met Jungkook. Jimin had nervously yet excitedly introduced him as his boyfriend. Yoongi had just known that they were roommates, but it was obvious upon seeing them together that there was something more between them. Always touching, always reaching for each other. Just slightest bits of physical contact at all times, be it intertwined pinkies or Jungkook’s hand on the back of Jimin’s chair, or Jimin twirling a strand of Jungkook’s hair with his finger. And the stars in Jimin’s eyes as he would look at Jungkook, the same if not something stronger reflected in Jungkook’s eyes as well.

Yoongi was protective and immediately disapproving, but he couldn’t deny that deep inside, he was happy that Jimin was happy, and that he had people around him to love and care for him. Something he didn’t have beyond Yoongi for his entire life before that. Jungkook was so doting, always attentive and attuned to Jimin’s emotions and wants. And Jimin returned all

the little acts of service enthusiastically, as Yoongi would see through their video calls when Jimin would often have a gift in tow for Jungkook, or plans to do something special for him.

They seemed besotted with each other, drowned and swathed and saturated with love.

But it's also these 'perfect' relationships that have the worst realities. It could've all been a facade.

What if Jungkook did something to Jimin, and hurt him or took him away to keep him quiet before Yoongi arrived to stop him? What if he noticed that Jimin was on the verge of confiding in Yoongi that day on the video call, and that's why he intervened and took the phone from Jimin?

Jungkook said he was on the bus when this happened. But wasn't he also on foot when he'd reached Jimin's cafe?

It starts to drizzle slightly then, and Yoongi's bones ache. It feels like there's too much for him to solve, to understand and uncover.

He hadn't found anything suspicious in their bedroom, nor did he find anything on Jungkook's phone. Hasn't found anything right now either.

But still, he can't let his guard down.

Jungkook eventually stands up once he calms down, and moves to leave campus. Yoongi watches as he enters a grocery store to buy rice, eggs and some vegetables. On his way out, Jungkook accidentally steps into a leftover puddle of rainwater, the imprint of his boots tacking the sidewalk behind him as he walks.

A clear footprint.

Yoongi approaches it, and scrutinizes it. He immediately takes a picture.

The first thing he does is compare it to the footprint he saw back in the cafe. He pulls up both images, side by side, and analyzes it.

Yoongi frowns immediately.

It's nearly identical. He can't get a solid estimate on whether the sizes match because both images were taken at different angles and distances, but the sole imprint looks exactly the same.

Yoongi's head snaps up, and he moves in a fast jog to get a little closer to Jungkook from behind. He eyes his sneakers. They're a standard pair of shoes he's seen loads of people wear, iconic of the brand. But still. Is it a coincidence? Or is Jungkook truly lying about everything?

He follows Jungkook, eyeing his sneakers the entire way. They seem like an old and worn pair, with scuffs along the white sole. If he wears them often, it's likely he would've worn them when he did whatever he did to Jimin too.

And if he isn't looking to tie up loose ends, or go to wherever he's keeping Jimin, it could mean that…

Yoongi forces himself out of his train of thought. The moment he finds solid proof, that's when he'll act. The footprints aren't enough evidence, and he quite literally has nothing else.

Yoongi walks until he sees Jungkook stop in the middle of his path, pulling out his phone and pressing it to his ear. Yoongi approached quickly, standing close enough so that he can overhear the conversation. Jungkook's got his back to him.

"Hello?...Oh, hi, Taemuk-ssi."

Taemuk…Yoongi has no idea who that is.

"No no, that's fine. Thanks. I'll come talk to you soon. Jimin's brother is here too so…yeah, I'll message you."

Yoongi perks up when Jungkook mentions him, watching as the other man ends his call and continues his walk home. He wonders when Jungkook will talk to him about it, if at all. If he hides it, it'll definitely be something to return to later. Taemuk...he'll remember that name.

Jungkook enters the apartment building, and Yoongi hangs around downstairs, not exactly wanting to head upstairs just yet. He'll have to call his university and work to extend his leave. He'd just booked 4 days off, and he still has a day to go, but it seems unlikely that they'll find Jimin in the next 24 hours. And even if they do, Yoongi won't up and leave immediately.

Initially, his plan was to make Jimin take a break and bring him back with him to Daejeon for a little while, if he didn't manage to calm Jimin down and fix the situation in these 4 days. The time apart from his usual life would've done him good, and they'd be able to spend uninterrupted time together for the first time in a long time.

He would've let Jimin know that no matter what happens, Yoongi will always be in his corner. A pillar of support willing to bear any weight to keep him safe.

Yoongi's phone beeps, and he takes it out.

Jeon Jungkook: I'm back home. There's a new lead we should look at, we'll talk about it when you're back.

Jeon Jungkook: I'm also making dinner, so you don't have to eat outside if you were planning on it. Couldn't find anything at the dorm

Yoongi sighs, giving in and heading upstairs. He punches in the code and walks into the apartment, coming face to face with Jungkook who's in the middle of sauteing some vegetables.

Jungkook nods at him in greeting. Yoongi looks away and downward, focusing his gaze on the ground as he takes off his shoes.

Jungkook doesn't ask where he's been, and Yoongi doesn't share either. Just like in the police station.

"What's the new lead?" Yoongi asks as he steps into the apartment.

"I got a call from Kang Taemuk. He's the person who handles the shift before Jimin at the cafe. Other than the last few customers, he's the last person to have seen Jimin. Definitely the last person he knew who interacted with him."

Even though Yoongi has done his level best to grow accustomed to the fact that Jimin is missing, hearing it phrased differently each time somehow still manages to rub salt into his wounds. The last person to have seen Jimin. It sounds so final. His fingers curl up into a fist, almost expecting to feel the instinctual grasp of Jimin's soft little palm in his, just like when they were children. It collapses like smoke in his hold, almost as if he'd never felt the sensation in the first place.

"Okay," Yoongi responds. "What did he say?"

"I told him we'd speak it over in person," Jungkook responds. "He said we can talk tomorrow."

"Why not today?"

"I thought you'd like to be there as well. And he's also busy with something else, so…"

It's a level of consideration Yoongi wasn't expecting to receive from Jungkook. He wouldn't have offered him the same courtesy, it wouldn't even have occurred to him. And even if it did, Yoongi still wouldn't have pushed to ensure they were in it together. Because they're not.

To him, it'll always feel like Jungkook is an outsider. Which is true, in a way. Jungkook and Jimin have known each other for a year. Whereas Yoongi…it's always been forever. It'll always be forever.

But still, Jungkook did tell him the truth.

"I hope he knows something, or saw anything. If someone was lurking around the store, or…" Jungkook trails off, before he perks up as he remembers something. While he speaks, he also sets some rice to cook. Yoongi remembers Jimin mentioning that Jungkook enjoys cooking. "The dorm also won't give me Jimin's old roommate's contact details, or his name. Something about a privacy breach. I did try, they told me that they'd give it to the police if they came with a warrant."

"Okay," Yoongi responds once more. It feels like it's all he can say. It's all he wants to say.

Jungkook nods, seemingly electing to proceed like normal and ignore the little spat they had earlier in the day. As he'd said, there are bigger things at stake.

"Need a hand?" Yoongi asks hesitantly, gesturing to the kitchen. An olive branch of sorts.

Jungkook smiles lightly then, nodding.

"Sure."

Dinner goes by smoothly. Working together, it's on the table in less than fifteen minutes. It's awkward as they sit together and eat, so Yoongi speaks.

"Why do you love my brother?" Yoongi asks.

Jungkook stiffens up at the question, looking up at him with wide eyes. Yoongi notices how Jungkook's face seems to tinge pink almost immediately, fingers tightening around his chopsticks.

"Can't think of anything?" Yoongi asks flatly, raising an eyebrow.

"No!" Jungkook responds immediately, voice rising in panic. "I've told Jimin loads of times before. It's kind of hard to just put it into words…especially in front of you."

Yoongi huffs a bitter laugh, pushing his food around his plate.

"I love him because he's…him," Jungkook responds. "I've always just loved him, even if I didn't understand it back then. I can't pin it on a specific reason because it feels like narrowing it down which is something I can't do. He's bright, and soft, and kind and he makes me happier than I've ever been. Everything he does makes my heart beat faster."

"Sounds dangerous."

"You might think it's funny, but it's not to me," Jungkook responds firmly, seeming miffed at the comment. "You'll meet someone eventually, who you feel this way for. Then you'll know. I love Jimin. Some feelings aren't exactly meant to be penned down into words…they just exist and bloom as they are. He's it for me."

"Hmm," Yoongi answers, unsure if he's satisfied with the answer. Jungkook sighs, his eyes drifting back to his mostly untouched bowl of food.

At this point, Jungkook is either telling the truth or he's an extremely good actor.

Jungkook doesn't say much after that, and they eat silently. Yoongi washes the dishes, and they don't interact for the rest of the night.

-

They meet Taemuk the next morning.

Taemuk perks up as soon as he sees Jungkook, flicking his still lit cigarette to the ground and crushing it under his shoe. He's short and lanky but he has a sweet face, leaning on the wall of his apartment building.

"Hey," Jungkook greets. Taemuk nods, and then looks at Yoongi.

"This is Jimin's older brother," Jungkook introduces. Taemuk offers him a bow which Yoongi hesitantly returns.

"You don't look much alike," Taemuk says conversationally, smiling lightly.

"We aren't alike in general," Yoongi responds brusquely. "You're Jimin's coworker?"

"Not exactly. I have the shift before him, so we see each other in passing. We chat too, but mostly just small talk before I leave and he takes over. I just found out what happened when I clocked in yesterday."

"You said you wanted to talk to us about something you noticed, or?" Jungkook prods.

"Have you spoken to Yeonjin? She's the one who does the shifts together with Jimin."

Jungkook shakes his head.

“So I went to go see her yesterday, because she got hit by a car the day before Jimin went missing.”

“What?” Jungkook exclaims. “Is she alright?”

“She broke her leg, that and a mild concussion,” Taemuk says, grimacing. “It was a hit and run while she was crossing the street. She’ll be fine, though. Just a few weeks of rest. Something about a big black car just speeding at her out of nowhere.”

“Did she say anything?” Yoongi questions.

“She just told me about that incident - Jungkook, you were there too, I heard - about Jimin having a panic attack in the employee room? The screaming and crying,” Taemuk starts. “And she said that in the shifts after he’d be terrified to check his phone when he retrieved it from the locker. Did you guys find anything on it?”

“No, it was shattered,” Jungkook responds. “It’s with the police right now. I’m sure they’re analyzing it.”

“Good, because based on what she said, there’s definitely something on it. My guess is he probably had a stalker or something. Maybe some creepy messages that scared him, or a threat-”

“A stalker?” Yoongi questions.

“A healthy chunk of our customer base has a crush on Jimin, we’d have repeat customers because of him,” Taemuk reveals. “From what I’ve heard, people would ask for his number

pretty often. And since he's too nice to really set boundaries, it might be possible that someone read too much into their interaction."

"But mostly women, right?" Yoongi prods. "We found male footprints."

"Yeah, mostly women," Taemuk sighs. "But there would be a few guys who'd linger and make conversation too. And you never know what people think, or could mask secretly…it could definitely be a man."

Jimin nevers knows how to say no, Yoongi thinks.

"Did he tell you anything about an ex-boyfriend?" Yoongi asks.

"No. I just know Jungkook," Taemuk says. "Again, we didn't speak that much. Mostly around 15 minutes each day? I go to evening school so I usually have to rush out…we were good friends but not close enough to talk about sensitive topics if that makes sense."

"And the day it happened?" Jungkook prods. "Anything you noticed?"

"The moment I told him Yeonjin was out sick, his face paled immediately. I'd never seen him look so scared before, and just assumed it was because he didn't want to handle the workload by himself. Which was understandable, considering that day was the deep cleaning day. Or maybe even the storm. That, together with what happened proves that there was already something he was scared of. And if it was a stalker, it would add up because they'd know where to find him, and the specifics of his schedule."

"You're pretty certain that this is a stalker," Yoongi questions but it comes out as a flat statement instead.

"It's something to consider. I'm a criminology student…it's a worthwhile possibility to look into."

“An ex who used to stalk him, but also cheated on him,” Yoongi tests. What a fucking loser.

“Yeah. That’s all I know. But I’d ask the cops to speed up scrubbing his phone if I were you. That’s what Yeonjin said anyway.”

“Thanks, Taemuk,” Jungkook sighs.

“Anything I can do to help. Jimin’s a nice person…he doesn’t deserve this. Keep me posted if you find anything.”

“Sure.”

They part ways then, and it’s when Taemuk is out of earshot that Yoongi speaks.

“I know you have class, so you can head there. I need to go to the police station,” he says. “Not just about the phone, but also about the fact that it’s been days with radio silence. I want to find out what they’re doing.”

“I’m coming with you, obviously,” Jungkook responds, frowning. “We’re in this together.”

Yoongi huffs a breath.

“What?” Jungkook asks. “Jimin is more important than class. I’ve already informed all of my professors anyway. You’re going to have to get used to me being around for everything. I’m not resting till we find him.”

Yoongi doesn’t elect to respond, rather turning around to start searching for a taxi to flag down. He doesn’t have the patience to look up bus schedules right now, not right now. He’ll just pick the fastest way to get there.

They manage to get one in under a minute, and Yoongi hops in the front seat while Jungkook occupies the back.

Yoongi's on his phone for most of the ride, scrolling through his chat with Jimin like he already has more times than he can count. His brain plays cruel tricks on him - telling him that he's going to finally find something new each time even though he's near memorized their chat history at this point. That somehow, he missed a big clue in the web of their messages that he suddenly won't anymore, and it'll all become as clear as day.

The moment they reach, Yoongi pays the fare and they get out of the car.

"Let me know how much I owe you-" Jungkook starts.

"Whatever we spend on finding Jimin, it's on me. We're not on equal terms here."

"But-"

Yoongi stalks up to him, gritting his teeth.

"You're the boyfriend, but I'm the brother. Jimin and I share blood and we are family. Stop pushing it. The responsibility to find him lies on my shoulders. Protecting him has always been something I have done. You can help all you want but understand that you do not need to be here. Nothing you say is going to change my mind. So don't intervene when I make decisions that are mine to make in the first place. I already have enough on my plate."

Jungkook's mouth clamps into a tight line.

"The sooner you get it, the better," Yoongi says before turning around and stalking into the police station.

He heads right to the reception, and the man sitting there looks up. Jungkook follows behind him.

“I’m here to meet the detectives for case 285743.”

The man doesn’t bother to type it into his system, furrowing his eyebrows at Yoongi.

“Do you have an appointment?”

“No.”

“Sir, you can’t just barge in-”

“Are they here or not? It’s been days with no word.”

“Our teams are busy, and they work on a number of cases-”

“Please check if they are available,” is all Yoongi responds with, his voice steely cold. “I won’t take up too much of their time.”

The receptionist sighs, and reluctantly inputs the number of the case into the system. He squints at the screen.

“Park Jimin, missing case?” He inquires, looking up at Yoongi. Yoongi nods.

“Have a seat.”

The receptionist picks up the phone and jabs a few numbers into it, whispering harshly into the line with a hand covering his mouth, his eyes on Yoongi. Yoongi stares back, Jungkook sitting silently next to him. The station doesn't seem very busy from the outside, but Yoongi can hear rapid footsteps, conversation and phone calls being taken deeper into the webs of corridors and cubicles further in.

The waiting area is sparse. It's still relatively early, he supposes. But is there really no one else whose loved one has been hurt, and are owed an explanation? It's all an old, drab, melancholy aesthetic, the air stale with it. Stuck in a continuum of time and space. There's a sombre blue hue clinging to every inch of the space despite it only touching noon.

"Stay seated. Detective Lim will be downstairs in fifteen minutes." The receptionist's voice echoes loudly. Jungkook bows his head slightly in return. Yoongi doesn't react at all, his fingernails picking at his pants.

He doesn't know what he's expecting. Truth be told, he's already disappointed. He hasn't seen any officers or any investigation efforts overtly. Wouldn't they have arrived at Jimin's university and started questioning people by now? Everyone who Yoongi and Jungkook spoke to hadn't been contacted by the police, and it was ultimately them who reported Jimin as missing to the university too. Is there a lead they're pursuing secretly, or have they made no progress since the report of the incident?

He's more than happy to do his own investigation as he already is, but the police have access to an arsenal of resources that he doesn't, like surveillance footage, warrants, data tracking and so much more. They have all of the evidence, including Jimin's phone which Yoongi needs to take a look at. This also isn't a situation where you can take your time with these things, not for a time sensitive case where every minute that passes without answers bodes for a sadder ending. They can't afford even a single second going to waste.

Yoongi and Jungkook look up as they hear footsteps a little while later, and they see a middle aged man in a wrinkled shirt and pants walking in their direction. He's holding a file and looks exhausted. Yoongi stands up, posture straightening. Jungkook stays sitting.

"Detective," Yoongi greets.

“What’s the matter?” The man responds brusquely. It’s not the responding officer from earlier. You can tell he’s overworked just by looking at him, the bloodshot eyes and the stale stench of cigarettes.

“I wanted to see if there was an update on my brothers’ case. And also about a potential lead we have found.”

“Your brother?”

“My brother, Park Jimin. The receptionist did give you the case number, right? He’s been missing for 4 days now.”

“Oh, uh,” the officer responds, clearing his throat. “We’re working on it.”

“What have you found?” Jungkook asks, now also standing up.

“We’ll let you know as and when we find anything. We request you to be patient in the meantime.”

“Have you done anything at all?” Yoongi asks, tone sharpening slightly. “We haven’t seen any officers on campus, and no one we know has been contacted.”

“Watch your tone, young man.” The detective’s voice hardens. Yoongi’s eyes drift to the folder he’s holding, and his eyes widen when he takes in the name of the case file.

“You aren’t even holding his case,” Yoongi accuses. “That’s the case file for Senator Oh’s son.”

“We handle a number of cases-”

“I know what’s happening here,” Yoongi huffs then, words scathingly bitter. “You’d rather spend all your time working on the famous case. Bet you have your superiors breathing down your neck to solve it. Bet that’s what everyone in there is working on too, right? No time to work on my brother’s case when there’s a media personality to attend to.”

“Why, you little-” The detective starts, fisting his hand into Yoongi’s collar. Jungkook darts forward to intervene.

“Who gives a fuck about the rest of us, right? Not when it’s a million times more important to find out who killed Senator Oh’s rapist son,” Yoongi spits, refusing to back down. He’s furious.

“Hyung, calm down,” Jungkook attempts, wedging himself in between them. It works with how big he is, and he tries to move Yoongi backward and away from the detective.

“They haven’t done anything,” Yoongi announces, mostly to himself, voice ragged. “They don’t care about Jimin. We’re on our own.”

“The investigation is underway. Don’t tell us how to do our jobs,” the detective fires back. “You can’t just waltz in here and demand access to sensitive information. We can’t just disclose confidential case notes which could compromise the investigation.”

“And you can’t just sit on a missing case when *you* know more than anyone that the chances of a happy ending dim the longer it stretches on,” Yoongi spits, finally backing off. He’s frustrated beyond belief.

“We’re working on it. If there’s anything, we’ll call you. Go home.”

The detective leaves then, walking away.

“At least check his fucking phone!” Yoongi shouts, his voice echoing as it bellows down the mostly empty corridor. “If you haven’t binned it already. Motherfucker.”

“Hey, you need to calm down,” Jungkook rushes out, voice stern. “We could’ve actually gotten somewhere if you didn’t lose your temper.”

“Gotten somewhere? Yeah, right.”

“I’m being serious. We’re at their mercy here. We can’t piss them off because they might mistreat the case or lose motivation.”

“I’m not at anybody’s fuckin’ mercy,” Yoongi spits. “We’ve been doing our own investigation, and at the very least *I* will continue to do so. I’m not fucking resting. Would it kill them to do their jobs?”

“Welcome to South Korea,” Jungkook sighs. “Other than verifying my alibi, I don’t think they’ve done much either.”

Yoongi stiffens up.

“They verified your alibi?”

“Yeah, a few days ago.”

Yoongi frowns. “You didn’t say anything.”

Jungkook frowns back.

“I thought it was understood. They verified it through the CCTV footage of the bus I was on. I got the automated email and SMS like you did on the day itself,” Jungkook explains. “It took them a while to get a hold of the tapes I assume.”

“Show me the email.”

“I already know why, so I’m not going to ask,” Jungkook mutters, pulling out his phone and opening up the email. “You can look at the sender and the unique code to make sure I didn’t fabricate it.”

He hands his phone to Yoongi, who takes it. His red eyes bore into the screen as he takes in the contents of the notification. He double-checks the sender’s information and reads it all. Jungkook was confirmed to be nowhere near the scene of the crime for an hour before it’s estimated to have happened. There’s even a written confirmation that it can be seen that Jungkook answered a call that matches the timestamp found earlier.

It’s legitimate.

So it’s not Jungkook. It’s been physically verified.

Even though Yoongi should be relieved, he doesn’t know why he feels a little more lost. At least Jungkook, in his head, was a viable possibility that he had within his grasp. And now… they’re really back to square one. Trying to pick out who this could be out of the millions of men living in this larger than life city, someone who seemed to put a colossal amount of thought into concealing their identity.

But at its base, at the core of it, it means that he can trust Jungkook for certain. Use him as another set of legs and hands, another mind to help piece this all together.

“Okay,” Yoongi says, handing the phone back to Jungkook. “Was just curious.”

“Sure,” Jungkook responds. “Whatever you say.”

They take the bus back to the apartment this time. It starts raining when they’re 20 minutes away.

Yoongi rests his head against the glass window, closing his eyes as a throbbing pain descends over his temples. Seoul flies by him unnoticed, and it feels like a momentary period of rest. His bones ache, as does his heart. He can’t fail in this. He can’t. He’s never let Jimin so much as nick his finger before, he can’t fail to protect him now. Now when it actually matters.

Across the city, Jimin lies awake.

He lies in a big unfamiliar bed, unaware of the time of the day due to the curtains drawn tightly that hide the light. Taehyung’s asleep next to him, or rather half on top of him, wrapped around him like the steely bars of a gilded cage. His deep breathing is loud against Jimin’s ears, nearly the only sensation he can feel if it weren’t for the throbbing pain of the bruise by his mouth and over his ribs, as well as the imprints round his throat.

Jimin stares up at the ceiling, the sound of rain falling deafening against his ears. The trauma response feels absolute, and he squeezes his eyes shut as his heartbeat ramps up. Tears leak out the edges, and he jerks as a crack of thunder whips down.

Taehyung shuffles closer, turning back onto his side and pulling Jimin into his arms. They’re now chest to chest, and one of Jimin’s ears is now blocked by the pillow underneath him. Taehyung’s hand comes up to cover his other ear. He can’t hear the rain anymore. Jimin’s eyes blink open, dazed. His trembling starts to slow down.

“Sleep,” Taehyung says, pressing a soft kiss to the corner of Jimin’s bloodied mouth.

Jimin closes his eyes, and it’s easier now somehow.

Chapter End Notes

Jimin send us ur location STAT!!!!!!!!!

And that's the 14th chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 15: Diving Deep

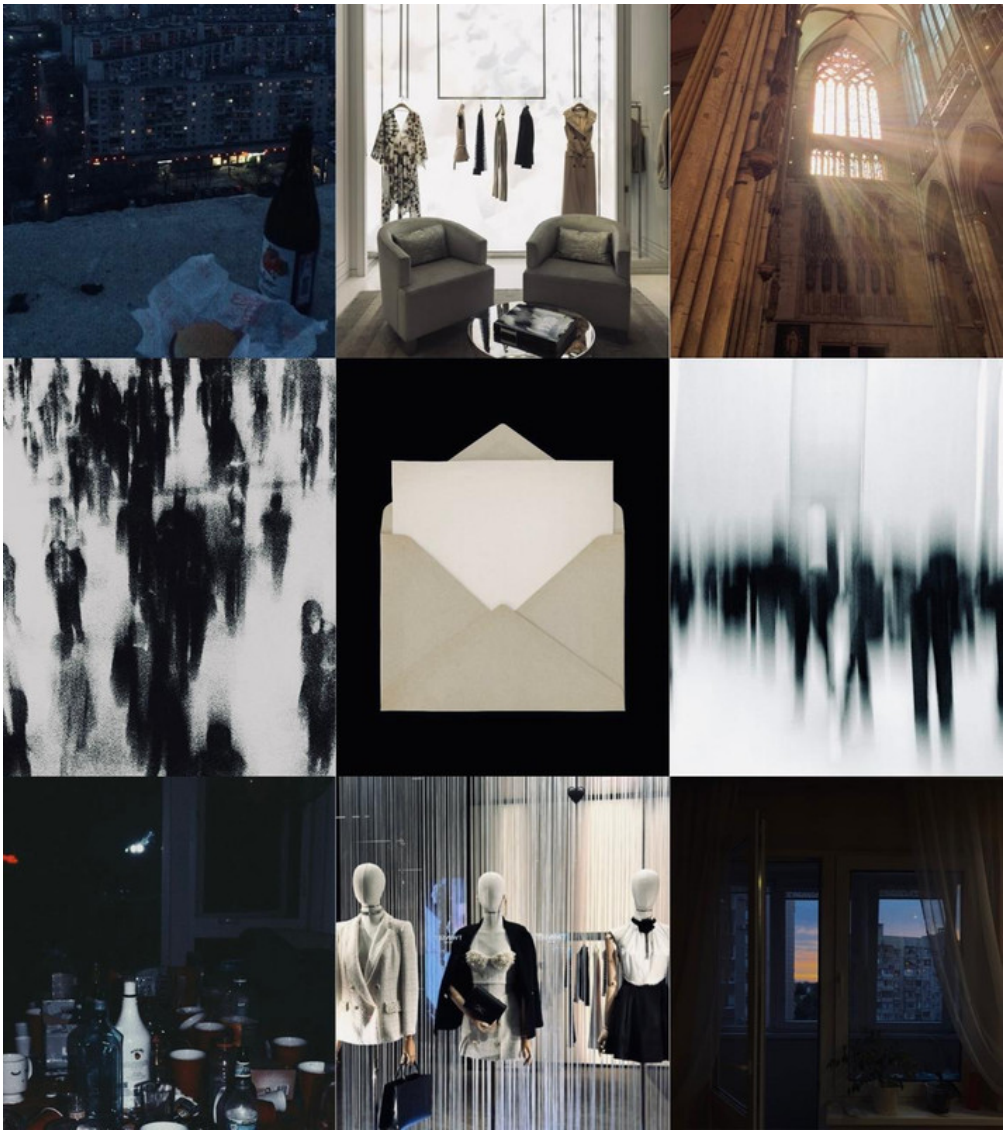
Chapter Notes

Here's the fifteenth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes



Days pass, certainty dwindles.

In Seoul, days fly by. They start and end quicker than they ever did in Yoongi's life before. Every day feels like a new chance, like a million new opportunities that would magically answer all of Yoongi's questions and lead him to Jimin. But every day also ends quicker than he can blink, and so far, they always have nothing concrete to show.

Today, it has been 13 days since Jimin disappeared.

And Yoongi's heartbroken to report that he hasn't made much of a breakthrough beyond mere speculation based on Jimin's history. The speculation may be tied to his gut instinct, but still, he's having issues reconciling the lack of results with the inexplicable urge to pursue the solitary lead of Jimin's ex boyfriend, instead of looking elsewhere.

And by now, they're way past the typical deadline of when someone 'lost' would usually be found or make their way back home. There's no word from the police either.

Still, Yoongi wakes up every morning determined. Today, he found his eyes opening at 4 am. He'd left the bedroom only to find Jungkook already awake and working out in the living room. Jungkook chooses to continue his strenuous exercise routine at home, because he doesn't want to be away in case Jimin returns. He wants to be able to open the door and see him right then and there, he'd told Yoongi.

They'd silently progressed with the rest of the early morning until it reached a reasonable hour. And then, they stepped out.

Right now, Yoongi's finally found the details of Jimin's old workplace. Hyora's contact was an old one, and when she'd taken Yoongi to the boutique she remembered visiting Jimin at, they'd found out that the business had moved operations. The landlord was unreachable, and Hyora couldn't remember the name of the business either. Jungkook wouldn't know because Jimin worked there before they met.

Yoongi doesn't know either, because he never asked.

He wonders how. It's out of character, strange for them. But he remembers it vividly, the specific day. Jimin had called him up in his first year of university to excitedly tell him that he'd gotten a part time job. When Yoongi asked him what it was, Jimin answered. And rather than congratulating him or pressing for more details, Yoongi opted to scold Jimin about why he'd chosen this type of job when it's the same one their mother's had for years. Their mother who worked and still works twelve hour shifts folding and refolding expensive clothing she's punished if she touches too much. Who comes home with sore feet and tired eyes every single day, hungry and sleep deprived.

Yoongi wanted something else for Jimin. Something that didn't seem so cumbersome and draining in a way that was so deeply personal for them. Jimin insisted that it made him feel

closer to their mom. But Yoongi, it always upset him. He wanted the both of them to break the cycle. So he never quite wanted to talk too much about the nitty gritties of Jimin's job beyond how he was doing and whether he was happy.

Jimin said he'd left the job because he'd found a new one with better pay, which ended up being his position at the bubble tea cafe. Yoongi didn't think checking his old place of employment was a priority until and unless he'd exhausted most of his possible leads. Which is, unfortunately, where he is right now.

Well, there's that and Jimin's university art club. Which has also been closed for sessions the past two months due to finals season.

Hyora's busy with exams, so Yoongi and Jungkook are the ones who head to the boutique. Jungkook's exams are more practical, and he'll be giving them in a few days. Yoongi hasn't seen him study at all, but he remembers Jimin telling him that Jungkook was the kind of person to whom success comes effortlessly.

It's a bus ride and a fifteen minute walk till they reach the boutique's new location.

They're clearly doing better now than they were before, having moved to a better part of town with more foot traffic. The glass storefront displays mannequins wearing expensive looking vintage clothing, and the crowd inside seems more than what you'd typically expect for a weekday morning. The attendants wear the uniform Yoongi's seen Jimin wear in several of their video calls back when he still worked here, an ivory blouse with delicate button detailing, paired with straight black pants.

"Do you think they'll know anything?" Jungkook asks Yoongi, as they hover on the sidewalk outside the store.

"It's a long shot, but we're running out of options." Yoongi's answer is brusque. "And there's a chance they'll know more than we do, considering the way things have panned out so far."

Jungkook just hums pensively.

Yoongi sighs, heading toward the door and pushing it open.

The chime inside goes off, and an attendant instinctively looks up at them with a smile that fades only slightly once she registers the sight of them. Yoongi understands the confusion, he and Jungkook probably look nothing like their usual clientele; Yoongi in a hoodie and faded jeans and Jungkook wearing a loose tee with cargo pants. They both look sleep deprived and hardened with distress.

Still, she approaches them, a smile still plastered on her face. Her neat bun is impeccable, no flyaways, uniform pristine.

“Welcome. May I help you?”

“Yeah, I’m not here to buy anythin’, sorry,' ' Yoongi answers gruffly. “I was wondering if I could speak to your manager?”

“I’m sorry, is something the matter?” She asks, seeming confused and a tad worried, but not unkind. “Ms. Baek is busy at the moment.”

“Uh, there was a Park Jimin who used to work here. At your old outlet?” Jungkook answers.

Realization dawns over the attendant’s face, and she smiles, sagging slightly with relief.

“Yes, I remember Jimin. I’m sorry, but who are you?”

“I’m his boyfriend, and this is his older brother,” Jungkook introduces, gesturing to Yoongi. “We were wondering if we could speak to you about the time he worked here. Anything you knew about his personal life or if anything odd happened during.”

She bows politely in greeting although her perfect eyebrows are knitted together.

“May I ask why? Is everything alright?”

“He’s missing,” Yoongi responds plainly. “Has been for the past two weeks. We’re trying to speak to everyone and draw up any potential culprits or important information.”

Shock strikes her face in the way it has in everyone they’ve spoken to so far. Her eyes turn rife with distress, mouth curving downwards immediately.

“Oh my god, that’s terrible,” she says. “I’m so sorry to hear that.”

“Thanks. Do you have any information?”

Just as she’s about to answer, the door chimes once more, alerting the three of them to the presence of a slew of new customers who look like they’re going to be lots of work and lots of sales.

“Uh,” she says. “I have to work right now. But we close for lunch at 1pm for an hour, so please come back then. I’ll speak to the other girls and Ms Baek too in the meantime and ask them to be there. I’m very sorry.”

“That’s fine,” Jungkook responds, bowing. “We’ll be here at 1.”

She bows once more before she darts to attend to the new customers, although her smile seems a little forced now.

“It seems promising,” Jungkook says once they’re outside. “I hope she knows something. She would’ve told us right away if she didn’t know anything right?”

“I don’t know,” Yoongi responds, picking at his jeans. It’s another drab, overcast day in Seoul. He hates this city. Whether it’s just an inherent dislike or a hatred that’s birthed from the recent tragedy, he isn’t sure. He can’t wait to get out of here, and hopefully take Jimin with him at least temporarily. Far away from this mess of a place.

But he too knows that the city can’t be blamed.

“It’s only 10 am. We have 3 hours to go before their lunch break starts,” Jungkook says, just as they settle to a slow gait before a bus stop. “Was there anything else you wanted to check out before then?”

“You said you used to see Jimin at the dorms before you started living together, right? During your first year?” Yoongi asks, squinting as the sun shines in his eyes. It’s a bright day out, and he can feel a migraine creeping over him.

“Yeah,” Jungkook responds. “Just in passing. But we never said anything more than hello.”

“Did you ever see anyone with him?”

Jungkook opens his mouth before he shuts it, thinking.

“No, now that I think about it,” he eventually responds. “I would always just see him by himself as we crossed each other in the hallways, or when he’d eat in the dining hall with the friends we already spoke to.”

Yoongi sighs, keeping his eyes on the pavement. A bus rolls into the stop, but neither of them really consider getting on, just hovering listlessly where they stand. Everything feels stilted and stagnant, directions unclear. There’s so much uncertainty. Yoongi’s legs and shoulders ache, a dull thrum emanating through his muscles.

“When I saw his poster on the bulletin board about wanting a roommate, it seemed super urgent. Like he really wanted to move out as soon as he could. Perhaps this person stayed in

the dorm? I wonder if this could've been someone else, perhaps from another course, or a senior," Jungkook muses aloud. "But I'm not too sure because again, I didn't really see him with anyone that rang any bells."

"Not his roommate, right?"

"No, I don't think so. Jimin's roommate had already moved out by then. It would've been perfect for him to stay considering he would have had the whole room to himself."

It's predictable at this point, consistent with the flow of events thus far; prodding just leading to more questions rather than any answers.

Jungkook starts to walk, and Yoongi hesitantly follows. They stroll around listlessly, staying within a certain radius of the store. The sun blares down on them. Cars whiz past them, as do busy people although mostly everyone should typically be at their offices by now.

It's 11:46 am when Jungkook's phone rings. He struggles to grasp for it where he's kept it somewhere within the web of pockets in his cargo pants, and his desperation renders him clumsier than usual.

Eventually, he manages to grab it and answer the call with rushed fingers.

"Hello?"

His eyebrows are knitted together before Yoongi sees his whole face light up, posture perking.

"Yeah, yeah, it's room 320," Jungkook spews out. "Last year."

Yoongi frowns, trying to swallow down the smidge of hope bubbling up in his gut. He looks down at his shoes, eyes trained on the sidewalk.

“Hae Duho,” Jungkook says. “Yeah, text that to me too please.”

The call ends a few seconds later, and Jungkook looks at him with eyes that finally seem alive. He’s clutching his phone with tight fingers.

“Jimin’s old roommate’s name is Hae Duho. I asked one of my friends who still lives in the dorm to do some digging, and we had a donation drive at the dorm last year to help flood victims. My friend was the one organizing it and he said they received some clothes and basic supplies from someone called Hae Duho from room 320. That was Jimin’s room.”

“Okay, that’s good,” Yoongi says. “Does he know where he is?”

“No,” Jungkook says, mouth curving downward. “He dropped out.”

“I remember Jimin telling me he was Christian, really orthodox too. Perhaps he attended a church nearby? We can scout the ones closest to your campus and ask around, especially since we know his name now.”

“Yeah,” Jungkook responds. “I’ll do that as soon as we’re done talking to the people at the boutique.”

Yoongi nods. He wants to shrink with shame, if he’s being honest. He talks so much about being Jimin’s brother and how close they are when he didn’t even know his roommate’s name. He’d asked initially for an emergency number that he could call, but Jimin had told him that his roommate didn’t have a phone. He dropped the topic after that. Yoongi’s time was stretched too thin, and he prioritized focusing on the moment whenever he had the time to call Jimin, rather than bothering to learn all of these specific details which he now knows are so important. There’s no excuse for it. He’s paying the cost of it right now.

An hour passes then. The two of them stop at a convenience store and eat two packaged triangle kimbaps each, which Yoongi pays for before Jungkook can say a word. They eat them silently, and then begin their walk back to the boutique.

Yoongi's heart rate darts up the moment they start to approach and notice the closed sign propped on the door, and one of the attendants hovering around inside. She catches his eye as she looks up, and stiffens before she bows, hurrying to open the door for them to enter.

There are 5 women inside, all looking at them curiously with some amount of concern. They exchange bows as the attendant from earlier shuts the door, and then they're encapsulated in the silence of the store.

"Hello. My name is Baek Yoona, the manager of this boutique," one of them says, stepping forward and handing them her business card which Jungkook takes graciously.

"Hi," Yoongi responds. "I'm Park Jimin's older brother. This is Jungkook, his…boyfriend," he trails off, clearing his throat.

"Hello," Jungkook echoes.

"We're extremely sorry and upset to hear about Jimin. We're all very fond of him and still miss him," Ms Baek says. "Please let us know what we can do to help."

"He was kidnapped from the cafe he works at; his new job. We think it was someone who knew him, and the conversations we've had with other people somehow lead us to believe that it could be an ex boyfriend. We were wondering if you knew anything about this during the time he worked here, or if you have any information," Yoongi informs. "The police are neglecting the case so we're practically on our own here. Any details, no matter how small, would help."

"Hmmm," one of the women say. "Jiminie would have someone pick him up from work sometimes, right?"

They all agree audibly. Both Yoongi and Jungkook perk up.

“Did you see him? Do you know his name?” Jungkook asks.

“No, we never saw him,” another one of the girls answers, her mouth curving downward. She has short hair and her face is slightly ashen. “He would always just wait in his car, never actually coming into the boutique. But he could’ve been a boyfriend because Jimin would blush and start to smile the moment he saw the car pull up outside. He would rush to finish up and we would tease him. But whenever we asked him about it he always denied that it was a boyfriend although it was obvious it was.”

“What kind of car?” Yoongi questions.

“Uhh,” Miss Baek says. “I don’t remember exactly. But it was a big black one. Fancy, I think.”

“It was a Palisade!” one of them says. “I remember looking once because I was curious.”

“A Palisade?” Jungkook balks. Yoongi’s face is blank but he’s surprised too.

A Palisade is an expensive car. Way out of reach for someone their age.

Yoongi hopes that it isn’t an older man that was taking advantage of Jimin. That would explain the lingerie set from back when they were in school…what kind of pervert targeted a highschool student? It makes him shudder with disgust and makes him both angrier and more frustrated in turn, because it would mean that he’s failed to protect Jimin from a predator.

“U-Um, excuse me,” a new voice pipes up, snapping Yoongi out of his train of thought. It’s a meek looking girl standing toward the back. “A while ago, there was a car like that that had come to the store.”

“What?” Miss Baek asks.

“Yes. The person inside had called out to me when I was locking up after my shift ended. I didn’t get too close because it was dark and late, and I was wary. They were parked across the street at our old outlet. He asked me where Jimin was and I said I didn’t know.”

“Did you see his face?”

“No, it was too dark and he was too far away for me to get a good look,” she says sheepishly, grimacing. “But he knew the days Jimin worked here, and knew his height and specific facial features. Even where he studied. I know because he’d listed them out so I’d know who he was talking about. I offered that he could return tomorrow and ask everyone if they knew where he was but he’d driven off instead of responding. He seemed a bit agitated and dangerous.”

“Dangerous how?” Jungkook asks.

“Just his energy,” she says. “There was something keeping me from crossing the road and I found myself releasing a breath I didn’t know I was holding the moment he drove off. He had a deep voice. I couldn't even see his face properly because he was mostly in the shadows. The window was half up too and it was tinted.”

“Hmm, alright,” Yoongi says. This is new. This is useful. They have a car model, that’s definitely an important detail to go by.

“Actually, the whole period of time when Jimin was leaving was extremely strange,” Ms Baek says. “He didn’t show for a few days, which is really out of character for him considering he would call even if he was going to be a few minutes late. And the only reason we found out he was quitting was because a woman came in to let us know that Jimin couldn’t come to work anymore. She’d come to collect his balance pay too. We were suspicious but she got Jimin on the phone to confirm that it was real and what he wanted. We were all heartbroken and hurt that he didn’t say goodbye.”

“A woman? Do you have a name?” Yoongi asks, puzzled.

“I don’t remember, sorry. But she had short hair and lots of tattoos. I would recognize her if I saw her.”

Yoongi is puzzled. They haven’t spoken to anyone like that thus far. Perhaps he should speak to Hyora about this.

“Okay. Let me guess, this happened in April of last year?”

“Yes, you’re right,” Miss Baek says. “Why?”

Yoongi sighs.

“That’s around the time he broke up with his boyfriend,” he offers. “We’ve spoken to nearly everyone here who knew him and we figured out that a lot of things changed in his life for the worse in April. You didn’t see him at all?”

“No. We only heard from him through the woman’s phone too.”

“No one we’ve spoken to managed to see him in April either. He only spoke to me over the phone too. I wonder why he didn’t let anyone see him…” Yoongi thinks aloud.

“Jiminie deleted his social media around that time too, right?” one of the attendants say. “I remember going to his profile to check on him after the silence and it said the account didn’t exist anymore.”

“Yeah, I remember that too,” Yoongi admits. “When I asked him about it he’d just told me that he was bored of the old account and wanted to start a fresh one.”

“I think he was trying to hide,” Jungkook says quietly. “From him.”

Yoongi's mouth presses shut. Jungkook continues to speak.

"If Jimin left this job…and deleted his social media, *and* moved out of the dorms…it's like he didn't want this person to find him. You said Jimin changed his number too. And about this man coming to the store to look for him, it proves that he didn't know where he was, which was probably Jimin's intention. Especially if he was so quick to rehaul his whole life."

Yoongi's stomach wrenches, nausea seeping through every inch of his body. He knows there's merit to what Jungkook is saying, and he should remain objective and calm, but hearing these things makes rife with grief. Grief and distress and a deep feeling of failure.

Stalker

Ex boyfriend

Cheater

And at the crux of it, a scared, terrified Jimin.

It's a conclusion he would have inevitably arrived at himself. That Jimin had someone to hide from.

He's clenching his teeth so hard that his jaw hurts.

"Do you know anything else that might be helpful?" Jungkook asks. He has a certain tone to his voice - soft and polite - as he talks to Jimin's old colleagues. He has this tone whenever they speak to anyone, and he used to whenever he used to talk to Yoongi too. But now, whenever they're alone, it seems Jungkook lets himself sound just as tired as they both really are.

“Not too much…I think Jimin was ill when he left? His voice was all wobbly when he spoke to us on the phone, and that’s what the woman said too. That he was too sick to come tell us in person, which he confirmed. And he didn’t sound scared, just really really tired. I even took the phone away from the woman so I could speak to him privately and confirm that there wasn’t anything suspicious happening,” Miss Baek says. “I’m sorry we don’t have anything more to help you.”

“Don’t apologize,” Yoongi says. “You’ve given us more than we’ve found in weeks.”

“You’re most welcome. Please keep us updated on what’s happening and let us know if there’s anything we can do or help with.”

“Thank you so much,” Jungkook says, bowing gratefully. They bow back, and Jungkook and Yoongi leave. They walk down the street, quiet for the first few minutes as they both digest the information they’ve received.

Eventually, Jungkook is the one who breaks the silence first. He speaks as soon as they reach their bus stop.

“Taemuk’s stalker theory might be real,” he says. “Do you think it might be some businessman based on the car? What if he was married and stringing Jimin along - and Jimin found out which was why they broke up. But this guy just couldn’t let it go…”

“Maybe,” Yoongi admits. “Fuck.”

“Speaking of which, I think a Palisade used to park outside our dorm sometimes. I’d seen it in passing and didn’t think too much of it until now. A lot of the students are rich and have their own vehicles, so…it could also be one of theirs but it’s just something to think about.”

Yoongi sighs.

“Wait, Yoongi-ssi!” Jungkook’s voice is sharp and alarmed, loud enough to attract the attention of some of the people they pass by.

“What?” Yoongi responds, flinching.

“Remember Yeonjin? The girl Jimin was supposed to do the shift with that day?” Jungkook demands.

Yoongi nods.

“Didn’t Taemuk say that she got hit by a big black car?” Jungkook asks. “It could be any car, or a coincidence, but it’s really odd, isn’t it? That she happened to be hit a big black car the very day Jimin got taken?”

Yoongi’s eyes widen. It’s a viable possibility.

“I’ll go talk to her soon and see if she remembers the exact type of car. Or if they’ve checked the CCTV to identify the vehicle,” Jungkook rambles. “Shit- it would be crazy if she was hit on purpose. It would be the perfect way to ensure she wouldn’t make her shift that day.”

Yoongi doesn’t respond this time, thinking.

The bus ride home drags on. They sit separately because the only two empty seats were apart, and Yoongi was quick to take his. It’s now the odd time right after lunch. Yoongi likes to sit while they take the bus because it allows him the time and space to reflect and think.

The moment they reach their stop, Jungkook gets down first and clears his throat.

“I’m gonna go ask around at the nearby churches,” he says. “In the meantime, would you mind calling Hyora and asking her about the woman the people at the boutique were talking about?”

“Okay.”

They part ways then, Jungkook jogging away rather quickly. Yoongi lingers for a while before he heads back to the apartment.

He unlocks the front door and steps inside, shucking off his shoes and hanging his jacket up on the little hook on the wall.

Yoongi sighs. The first thing he does is sit on the sofa, let his hand drift over the throw draped over the furniture that he knows has been knitted by Jimin, and then pull out his phone.

His contact list is minimal. He has Jimin and their parents, a few friends from school, his old Taekwondo coach, his managers at his part time jobs and internships, some of his college professors and finally, Jungkook and now Hyora.

He clicks her number, closing his eyes and bringing his fingers up to massage the bridge of his nose once Hyora’s peppy caller tune starts playing. It’s some idol group song. It’s giving him a headache, the pulsing pain of it accentuating the longer it takes for the girl to answer her phone.

“Hello? Yoongi Oppa?” She’s obviously walking down a street, the sounds of people chatting and cars passing by loud in the background.

“Hyora, hey,” Yoongi answers. “Jungkook and I spoke to Jimin’s old coworkers. Got some new information.”

“Fuck, that’s great! What did they say?”

“Jimin’s ex boyfriend used to sometimes pick him up in a black Palisade. The same car even came to the store looking for him months after he’d left.”

“A Palisade? That’s so weird. I’ll ask around about that-”

“And also, do you know of a woman Jimin used to talk to with short hair and tattoos?” Yoongi asks.

“Short hair and tattoos, short hair and tattoos-” Hyora repeats to herself as she scans her memory.

“Yeah. Know anyone like that?”

“Wait, yeah!” She exclaims suddenly. *“That sounds like Jimin’s art teacher! He used to attend some classes with her.”*

“She’s a professor?” Yoongi balks.

“No, she isn’t. She’s a famous online artist who used to hold some sessions privately. Jimin used to go for a few. I think she’s around our age. Why?”

Jimin had mentioned some art classes he used to go to once in a while…

“She’s apparently the one who stopped by the boutique to tell them that Jimin was quitting. She even had him on the phone to confirm it.”

“What? No way. Daeun did that?”

“Her name is Daeun?” Yoongi asks. He says the name once more to himself.

“Yeah. Choi Daeun. I’ll send you the link to her art page. I didn’t think she was important at all so I didn’t-”

“Yes, send it to me please. I’ll contact her immediately.”

“Got it. See you soon, I’ll ask Jungkook when it’s a good time for me to come over and we can talk about this in detail.”

“Okay.”

The call ends.

A random girl who used to teach Jimin art…no matter how much Yoongi tries, none of this is really making any sense. But he’s convinced now that he’s hit gold. This woman would definitely know everything.

The moment Hyora sends him the link, Yoongi clicks it. It takes him to the woman’s Instagram page, one with a healthy follower count and colourful feed.

But, it hasn’t been updated in a long time. The last post was in May of last year. There’s a note in the bio of the profile saying that the account is on hiatus and is not being monitored until she returns from her break.

Yoongi curses under his breath. There’s a business contact email though, for collaborations and commissions. Yoongi starts to draft a message immediately.

Hello. This is Yoongi. I am Park Jimin’s brother. I urgently need to speak to you about him as I understand something happened to him last year which you were aware of. Please respond as soon as you see this.

Yoongi even includes his phone number.

As soon as he sends the email, he gets an automated response back.

Hello,

Thank you for contacting me. Unfortunately I am not open for collaborations nor am I taking any commissions at the moment. I will respond to you personally as soon as I can. Thanks.

Yoongi curses once more. There's no number listed anywhere. He pulls open his chat with Hyora.

Me: The account isn't active right now. Her email doesn't work either. Do you have a phone number?

The message doesn't deliver. Hyora must be in class. Yoongi feels frustrated beyond belief, but it's mostly disappointment. It feels like everything is tailored to build his hope and then shatter it in the same breath. What are the odds that almost every good lead results in a dead end?

Hours pass. Yoongi eventually starts to make dinner, some rice in the cooker and a simple broth brewing on the stove. He monitors it every few minutes. Black car…a Palisade...asking where Jimin was…an artist coming to collect Jimin's pay…

Eventually, dinner's ready. And all Yoongi can do is sit around. He calls Jungkook, who answers only to curtly tell him that he should be home in an hour's time.

A Palisade…Yoongi's seen them before. They're expensive, but not as uncommon as foreign luxury cars. He'd seen a few back in their hometown too. He thinks about different things sporadically as he waits, while the sun has long since set in their windows. The sounds of traffic and people walking by seep in through the gaps, but it's all white noise in Yoongi's ears.

Mentally, Yoongi thinks right now is the worst he's ever been. Despite the sudden revelation, he knows that it will be worse tomorrow, and the pain will continue to fester until Jimin is found. The pain has only grown deeper, although the sudden shock has alleviated, replaced by a deep guilt and higher anxiety. His mind unwittingly puts him through every gruesome and horrible scenario of what the truth could be. It drives and pushes him to keep going all the same, but it's all very far from being easy. It feels monotonous at this point, lacking in impact with how many times he's thought it - that this is his fault. That so much has happened under his own nose, to the person who is most valued in his eyes and heart. That he's been lied to, and seems to know less than someone Jimin has known for barely a year. Can it be attributed to age, and how they have grown apart; a glaring fact Yoongi cannot deny? Still intrinsically close, but too far to still know every inch of each other's lives and soul? There used to be a time when Yoongi would know every single thing Jimin ate, and would be able to tell you exactly what he wore when, and what his favourite fancy was at the time. Specific details that he didn't think would be so important, but are now proving to be crucial.

Yoongi's dealing with what seems to be a permanent migraine. He's in the middle of leaning back against the couch with closed aching eyes when he hears the door beep as it's unlocked.

"Yoongi-ssi? I'm back," Jungkook's voice sounds out, energetic and perked. Yoongi opens his eyes. "I found Duho!"

Now, Yoongi sits up sharply. Jungkook's hair is damp and his clothes look splattered with rainfall. He'd clearly been caught in a drizzle, but it does nothing to douse the fire in his eyes.

"I went to 3 of the closest churches to our university, and spoke to all the pastors. One of them was able to recognize who I was talking about because Duho would visit every evening to offer a prayer. I explained the whole situation to him and told him how desperate we were. I even persuaded him to arrange a contact between us and while he refused to divulge information about his address or personal details he said that if I came back tomorrow at 5pm he'd have Duho ready on the phone to talk to us!" Jungkook exclaimed, looking more alive than he has in weeks.

"That's fucking amazing," Yoongi responds, unrestrained. He's thrilled too, his heart hammering in his chest.

The little praise seems to mean everything to Jungkook because he perks up further.

“And-And-” Jungkook fires up once more, stopping to catch his breath. “I called Yeonjin. She’s home now and recovering. She said that it was definitely a Palisade that hit her because they checked nearby dashcam footage and identified the vehicle. It was also definitely intentional. The bad part is that the licence plate was covered with something black and the windows were-”

“Tinted,” Yoongi completes. “So it likely was him.”

“Yeah,” Jungkook responds, shoulders slumping. “We’re dealing with a nutcase by the looks of it.”

“We need to have an agreement,” Yoongi says suddenly. Jungkook’s mouth closes, listening.

“When we find this guy,” Yoongi starts. “I don’t want to see you rushing to call the police as soon as we get him.”

Jungkook’s eyebrows furrow with confusion.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m going to break his bones and beat the shit out of him, for even touching my brother,” Yoongi responds flatly. “You can do whatever. But don’t get in my way.”

Jungkook seems to take some time to process his words. But eventually, his face hardens and he nods resolutely.

“I won’t. And I’ll be right there with you.”

Yoongi can’t seem to hold back the tiniest of smiles.

-

“Are you religious?”

Jungkook looks up from where he’s adjusting the collar of his shirt. They’re just about ready to leave for the church.

“No, not really,” he responds sheepishly. “I know Jimin isn’t particularly either but he does believe in god. What about you?”

“Never had the time to think about it,” Yoongi answers. He’s only a year older than Jungkook but in several instances much like this one, they feel decades apart. If he thinks about it, he always also saw Jimin as a child several years younger to him rather than someone just under his age. Is it because he had to grow up too fast? Or have both Jimin and Jungkook just led lives that let them bloom as they were without their bubbles bursting?

“My grandparents are,” Jungkook offers conversationally, just as he walks to the foyer to slip on his shoes. Yoongi follows, doing the same. He’s carrying a notebook and pen with him so he can jot down anything important that Hae Duho says.

Then, they leave. Walk the same walk to the same bus stop where they wait for the correct bus. They board it, sit together since two side by side seats are free, and get through the journey in silence.

Yesterday, Hyora found out that Daeun goes to Korea University for art, and is Yoongi’s age. However she’s opted for only remote sessions this semester and seems to have moved out of Seoul in May of last year. Which isn’t too far off from Jimin’s April. Yoongi wonders if she’s an accomplice.

Jungkook nudges his elbow once it's their stop. It's a fifteen minute walk till they get there, Yoongi's eyebrows raising once the tall structure comes into view. The land is surrounded by a lush lawn and a wrought iron fence round the perimeter.

Jungkook charges his way ahead, and Yoongi follows. He can hear voices inside and it's beautiful once they enter. He's never been inside of a church before. The chapel is stunning, and the stained glass windows and tall ceilings only add to it. A few of the benches are occupied by people who are fervently praying.

An older man seems to recognize Jungkook, excusing himself from his current conversation and heading towards them with a smile.

"Good Afternoon, Father," Jungkook greets politely. "How are you?"

"I'm okay, son. You're right on time. Duho should be able to help you, I spoke to his father yesterday over the phone-" the pastor immediately starts to lead them elsewhere. He has kind eyes and greying hair. "Duho is very upset about the news. I only happen to have the number to their family landline because Duho's parents planned to send him to a summer excursion we're planning to have this year."

"Thank you," Jungkook answers.

"And who are you, young man?" The pastor asks as they walk. He leads them to a room on the other side of the compound, which looks more like an office. There's a donations desk, so this is probably their admin department.

The question is directed towards him.

"I'm Park Jimin's older brother," Yoongi answers.

"I see. I hope you find your brother soon."

“Thank you.”

The pastor leads them to one of the desks, where he asks the woman sitting by it to call Hae Kyungpil. She does as told, and Jungkook asks her to put the call on speaker just as they both sit down, Yoongi pulling up an extra chair.

The line rings for a long while, and Yoongi’s leg shakes impatiently. What if he doesn’t pick up? If they’re told to return tomorrow, Yoongi might snap.

“Hello? Pastor?”

“Ah, yes, hello,” Yoongi answers, straightening up. “This is Yoongi, Park Jimin’s brother. We’re calling to speak to Duho?”

“Oh! He’s been waiting for your call. Duho-ah!”

Yoongi and Jungkook wait impatiently. Jungkook’s picking at his nails while Yoongi digs his fingers into the leather of the chair he’s sitting on, grinding the soles of his feet onto the tiled flooring. It’s silent and nauseating.

“Hello?”

“Hello!” Jungkook responds. “Duho, is that you?”

“...Yes.”

Duho’s voice is wafer thin.

“You probably don’t recognize me,” Jungkook laughs awkwardly. “But my name is Jeon Jungkook. I used to live in the dorms last year too, on the same floor, room 303.”

“I don’t remember. Sorry.”

“That’s fine. You know why we’re calling you, right?”

“Yes. Jimin is missing. Have you found him?”

Jungkook exchanges a look with Yoongi before he clears his throat.

“Not yet, no. We need your help, Duho.”

“How?”

“Do you remember ever seeing Jimin with someone?” He has to be careful about his wording, given where they are. “Someone he was close to?”

“U-Um, I remember Namwoo and Haneul.”

Two of Jimin’s friends they’ve already spoken to.

“Anyone other than them, Duho?” Jungkook presses. “Someone Jimin would have been very close to.”

“Are you looking for a bad man?” Duho asks suddenly.

“Yes,” Yoongi responds.

“A scary man had come to our room looking for Jimin once when he was out,” Duho reveals.

“Who was it?”

“I don’t know. I had never seen him before. But I can tell you what he looked like. I still remember.”

Yoongi’s heart speeds up.

“Yes, please.”

“He was tall, and a little muscular. He had thick eyebrows and a sharp nose and his hair was curly and black. His eyes were very scary. But he was very handsome. He had a deep voice too.”

Yoongi’s mind runs, scribbling all of this into his notebook.

“How old was he, Duho? Any guess?” Jungkook asks then. “Was he much older to us?”

“No, he looked like he was our age.”

Both Yoongi and Jungkook pause for a moment.

“Okay. Did you speak to him?”

“Yes. He was very rude and scary. I hadn’t seen Jimin for a week because he disappeared on sick leave. I wanted to call him but I didn’t have a personal mobile phone. This man had come to our room looking for him. He barged his way in and started asking me where he was and threatened to hurt me if I didn’t tell Jimin to call him the next time I saw him. I asked him to leave but he wouldn’t. He kept using curse words and was very mean to me.”

Yoongi’s pen flies over the paper as he writes all of his down while his phone also records it just in case. The fallback seems precious because his mind is reeling.

“Did he hurt you?” Jungkook asks.

“No,” Duho answers. *“B-But he said some mean things about Jimin which I can’t say out loud when I asked him what their relationship was.”*

“Okay,” Yoongi answers. “Did you see Jimin at any point during the month of April?”

“Yes. He came back to our room after 3 weeks of not showing up. I think he was attacked by someone, he was crying a lot too.”

Nausea. Immediate and overwhelming.

“What do you mean?” Jungkook asks, his voice tense.

“His face had bruises and I think he broke his arm. The moment he’d returned he’d run to the bathroom to throw up. He had a cut and stitches on his face too. He cried the whole night and was unnaturally quiet till I left the dorms on my last day too.”

“What?” Yoongi snaps.

The blinding rage paired with the shock consumes him. There’s no way that Jimin was assaulted by this man. There’s no fucking way. But it also explains everything - why he

didn't let anyone see him till when he would've recovered.

"I d-don't know anything else," Duho says, his voice wobbling. *"I want him to be okay. When you find him, please tell him that…I don't hate him."*

"Why would you hate him?" Jungkook asks, although his eyes are blazing. They're both processing this new information and neither seems to be taking it well.

Yoongi can't seem to do anything but sit still, his head spinning. His throat starts to hurt with how heavy it feels.

"He is…different. And I was scared at first so I didn't talk to him as much anymore but now I r-regret it because he was nothing but nice to me. Everyone else was mostly mean but he was the only one who was kind. I just want him to be safe and happy. I'll pray for him everyday."

"Thank you, Duho. We really appreciate it. This has helped us so much."

"Please call me once you find him."

"We will. Have a nice day."

The call ends then.

Yoongi can't control what he's feeling. Hot tears spill out of his eyes, slipping down his cheeks and then off his clenched jaw. His heart has broken. This person hurt Jimin. Someone *hurt Jimin.*

"I hope that was helpful-" the pastor starts.

“Sorry,” Yoongi says, standing up and heading straight out. He can’t handle it. Jungkook says quick thank yous and rushes to follow him. He places a hand on his shoulder which Yoongi shrugs off violently.

He can’t take it. There’s a lot of things he can take - but violence towards his brother? He closes his eyes and sees the little Jimin he remembers from his childhood. Soft and warm and innocent and always bursting with hugs and smiles. The kindest and most loving person you would ever meet, harmless in every way. His baby…

“We’ll find him, Yoongi-” Jungkook starts. “Trust me, I’m furious too, but we need to stay sane. My heart’s fucking shattered but we have to keep going.”

“He’s just a kid….he would never hurt anyone,” Yoongi says. “Why would anyone ever want to hurt him? How could anyone ever bring themselves to hurt someone like him?”

“I don’t know,” Jungkook responds, voice hoarse. His eyes are wet and red. “We’ll make them pay.”

“I’ll kill him,” Yoongi says. “There’s no other option now.”

Jungkook doesn’t say anything this time. Yoongi’s thankful for it. He needs to wrap his head around it. But he also knows that Jungkook is right - they don’t have time to waste or spare. Enough time has already passed. Yoongi can’t waste anymore of it grieving, or doing anything but finding Jimin. He needs to burn the rage down to fuel. And use it. The finish line makes up for it all.

The two of them stand in silence once they reach the bus stop. Yoongi doesn’t even remember the journey here. Jungkook stands next to him, the air between them heavy.

It takes fifteen minutes for the bus to arrive. It’s nearing afternoon now. The large vehicle pulls into the stop, its doors folding open for them to enter.

Jungkook gets on first. Yoongi's about to follow when his phone starts to ring.

It's an unknown number.

"Hello?" He answers, voice rough.

"Hyung, get on," Jungkook says from the entrance. Yoongi signals for him to shut up.

"Hello, is this Min Yoongi speaking?"

"Yes."

"I'm calling from the Seoul Metropolitan Police Headquarters, Missing Cases Division. This is regarding your brother's case."

"Yes, what is it?" Yoongi demands. His chest starts to hurt with how fast his heartbeat ramps up. His stomach wrenches painfully inside his stomach.

"Please come in as soon as you can. We have some updates to share with you."

"Okay. We'll be right there," Yoongi half shouts. He looks up at Jungkook, just as the bus driver honks impatiently.

"Get off the fucking bus. The cops called."

Jungkook's out of the vehicle and standing next to him faster than he can blink. The bus speeds off down the road.

“What did they say?” Jungkook yells.

“They want us to come in right now. They have updates. Do you think they’ve found him?” Yoongi demands, just as he starts trying to flag down a taxi that can get them to the police station quicker.

“I hope so,” Jungkook responds, voice brittle. “But…they would’ve said that if they did, right? They wouldn’t have just asked us to come in without telling us that they’d found him first…”

Jungkook’s words sink into Yoongi’s stomach like rocks.

They manage to get a taxi mere seconds later, and Jungkook gives him the address as Yoongi sits dazed in the backseat.

What could they be calling them in for, if not that?

His mind runs.

Jimin can’t be…..

No. He’s not going to panic unless he has a reason to panic.

He sits through the entire taxi ride with clenched fists and red burning eyes that keep searching the streets for the police station. He’s restless and impatient. He needs to know, now, but there’s a looming dread that’s taking form inside of him that also wishes that this cab ride goes on forever so he never has to find out if it’s anything bad.

Nothing lasts forever, though. They arrive sooner than Yoongi can comprehend it. He pays the driver the fare with clammy fingers, and the two of them run into the wide, staggeringly large building. Yoongi nearly crashes into the reception desk.

“Hello, I got a call about my brother. Park Jimin.”

“Please be seated.”

Yoongi’s too wound up to argue. He sits at one of the visitors’ chairs, picking his nails bloody and raw. His heart is hammering inside of him, so loud he can hear it reverberating in his ear drums. He’s sweating. Jungkook stands, hovering.

Eventually, two detectives arrive and ask them to follow them. They both comply, and are led down stark white corridors, occasionally passed by other officers and administrative staff. Yoongi’s worn out sneakers squeak against the polished floors, and Jungkook’s footsteps are loud and audible.

They’re led into a room with a table that has two chairs on either side of it. There’s an envelope on the table.

“Have a seat, both of you.”

They do.

“Officer, please tell us-” Jungkook starts, his soft voice sounding out.

“We received a letter from Park Jimin. It was delivered to the station yesterday morning.”

Jungkook’s mouth clamps shut, and Yoongi’s eyes widen.

“Can we see it?” He asks.

“Yes.”

Yoongi picks up the envelope on the table after a few seconds with no audible direction. He opens it with trembling fingers, pulling out a sheet of paper. Jungkook leans in closer to read it along with him the moment he unfolds it.

Hello,

My name is Park Jimin, and I’ve been registered as missing by my brother Min Yoongi.

I’m writing this letter to let you know that I have not been kidnapped. I have made the conscious and purposeful decision to abandon my life. I was overwhelmed by university work and I felt suffocated by my brother and Jeon Jungkook. Spending time around them has been affecting my mental health. I needed to escape them and I am happy now. Please do not come looking for me, and please respect my decision. I am alive and well. Do not look for me, that is my only request.

Park Jimin

What?

Yoongi’s frozen.

“Can you verify that this is Park Jimin’s handwriting?”

“Yes,” Yoongi says blankly. This is his brother’s handwriting. But there’s no way….

“He didn’t write this,” Jungkook says. “He would never say things like this.”

“The thing is,” one of the detectives start. “He *did*. His are the only fingerprints on the paper and the envelope it arrived in. And the handwriting on it is a 100% match based on our analysis with previous samples found in his study notebooks. We also deduced that he was in a calm state of mind while writing this based on the strokes, penmanship and legibility. It was not written under duress.”

“There’s no way you’re actually taking this letter seriously,” Yoongi spits, his blood boiling. “It doesn’t make any sense. Why would he want to run away?”

“Looking at the two of you, and judging your behaviour during your last visit here, it might be possible that he really was overwhelmed and was looking for a break,” one of the detectives argues.

“You don’t know a single fucking thing about our relationship. This is crazy. Why are you showing this to us?” Yoongi snaps.

“Because it’s given us plausible reasons to close the case.”

Both Jungkook and Yoongi are stunned into silence.

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

“The letter was written the day before yesterday and mailed the same day according to forensics. Which means that he is alive and well and faces no threat. He has said so himself and this letter is in fact addressed to us.”

“How about you find him first, extract this very statement from him verbally and then talk?” Jungkook snaps. “How can you close an investigation based on a letter? What if it’s just a really close replica of his handwriting? What if his kidnapper forced him to write it?”

“He didn’t, based on the forensics-”

“What fucking forensics?” Yoongi yells, standing up. The chair screeches back behind him. “Are you fucking screwed in the head? Didn’t your ‘forensics’ find that Jimin had barricaded himself inside the cafe and that the doors were broken down from the outside by someone else? Did your fucking forensics not count when all you could find were evidences of a scuffle and struggle? Why the fuck would he break his phone the way he did if he was just planning to run away? And even if it was a farce, which it was not, why would he suddenly backtrack by sending this letter? Why were the fucking CCTV cameras broken?”

“Don’t tell us how to do our jobs, you piece of shit,” the detective spits, also standing up.

“You never paid any attention to his case, and now you’re just grabbing the first opportunity to close it so it’s finally off your plate,” Jungkook says quietly. “It is what you’re doing and you know that we know as well. Where is your empathy? This involves a real person.”

The man goes red in the face, flush with embarrassment.

“Everything has been based off of evidence-”

“This can’t be real. There’s no way this is fucking real. Even a kid could tell you that this is crazy!” Yoongi shouts.

“Please,” Jungkook begs then, voice broken. “Please don’t close the case. Please keep looking. If he really wants it we’ll stay away from him but please just verify that he’s okay, and confirm it with your own eyes. Please.”

“It’s already been done. The case is closed. We called you here to give you closure, and to let you know that you can collect his personal effects from the evidence department on the fourth floor.”

Yoongi snarls and lunges for him, Jungkook only just managing to hold him back in time.

“I’m going to fucking sue,” Yoongi spits. “You’ll pay for this. Pathetic excuses for law enforcement. How do you fucking sleep at night knowing that the people depend on you and this is what you do to them? You’re paid for being fucking incompetent.”

“Hyung- don’t-”

The detectives walk out of the room. Yoongi manages to shake Jungkook off and he leans forward, bracing himself on the cold steel table. He’s seeing spots in his vision with anger, chest heaving.

It’s silent for a long time. Neither of them know what to say to each other. Unexpected in every way.

“Fuck- what do we do?” Jungkook asks.

Yoongi steels his jaw and stands upright. He forcibly blinks away the rage in his red eyes. He’s tired. He’s drained.

“We have to keep going, these assholes weren’t doing anything to help anyway,” he says, although it’s mostly aimed towards keeping himself sane. “They’re going to fucking rot in hell.”

But what it means is also, that they are truly on their own now. Perhaps they always were.

Jimin’s personal effects are his shattered phone and his backpack with just his school books and stationery, even an empty lunchbox. Jungkook smiles sadly once he sees it, a confirmation that Jimin had eaten the lunch he’d lovingly made for him that morning.

“I’ll give his phone to one of my friends and see if he can scrub any data,” Jungkook says on the bus ride back. “Are you doing okay?”

Yoongi isn't. He thinks that the weight of everything is slowly growing too much for him to bear while still remaining sane. He feels worn down like a part of him deep inside has started to crack.

The thought of the letter actually being real doesn't help, but it seems to have made a content home at the forefront of his mind.

Jimin felt suffocated by him…felt the need to escape him.

No. It's not true. It isn't. Factually, it isn't. It's been fabricated. Jungkook's right. All the evidence points to it and Jimin actually feeling that way wouldn't be consistent at all with everything they've found out so far.

But Yoongi has been a terrible brother, especially in the moments, days and weeks leading up to his disappearance. Jungkook and him did their best, in their own ways, to dig the information out of him. Perhaps Jimin just finally had enough. Jungkook, for a year. Yoongi, for a lifetime.

"Yoongi-ssi?" Jungkook prods.

"Y-Yeah," he responds. "I'm fine."

Jungkook doesn't respond, but he looks at him for a few seconds before he takes a deep breath and redirects his attention to the window of the bus.

The rest of the day goes by in a haze. The moment they get home, Yoongi just heads to the bedroom and shuts the door. It starts to rain outside, the thunder loud and imposing and seemingly shaking the apartment building. Jungkook doesn't come by to ask what he'd like to eat either. They're both quiet.

Yoongi isn't able to sleep, not a single wink.

-

Three weeks pass.

At this point, Yoongi's had to quit his internship and start his classes online. He'd been saving money for a while to take Jimin on a trip, so he uses that fund to cover Jimin's part of the rent for this month, and to help with living expenses. Jungkook insisted there was no need but Yoongi knows that he's struggling too. They haven't been living on much, simple meals and utilities with zero indulgence so costs haven't been high. He told his landlord in Daejeon to find someone else if he needs the rent and the kind man offered to wait, so Yoongi's thankful.

Jungkook's friend who is an expert in tech said that Jimin's phone was unsalvageable, because the internal memory and RAM were damaged. There's nothing of consequence in the other items they collected from the evidence room either.

His email to Daeun is still unanswered. Yoongi went to the dorms to take a look at the security footage and see if he could spot the person who spoke to Duho, but they had erased it due it being over a year since the events.

Yoongi's feeling more and more restless. His mental health has been worsening with each day that passes. It's been over a month since Jimin went missing. Jungkook and him hardly talk anymore, because the lack of leads to discuss is disheartening at most. Jungkook has returned to his part time jobs because he needs it to survive, but has started to take on more night shifts so he's available during the day.

It's all bleak, and feels hopeless. He's put up missing posters all over the city, spent one week travelling to every bit of the city and making sure they've covered everywhere possible.

No leads so far. Not a single call.

Yoongi's not sure where to go from here.

One day, he's walking back to the apartment from the grocery store, armed with bags of rice, basic vegetables and eggs. The standard diet he and Jungkook have been following - simple with the bare minimum nutrition and effort.

"Min Yoongi? Is that you?" A voice calls from slightly afar.

Yoongi looks up, coming face to face with Han Sunwoo, one of his Taekwondo teammates from high school, funnily enough. He's standing on the other end of the crosswalk, waving at him with a big smile on his face. In his hand is a plastic bag full of bottles of soju, chips and instant ramen.

"Hey," Yoongi responds, clenching his jaw when Sunwoo approaches. The other man seems thrilled to see him.

"Fuck dude, you've lost so much weight," Sunwoo comments, smacking his arm. Yoongi just barely resists the urge to punch him in the face. "How's it going? What brings you to Seoul? I thought you were all set up at KAIST."

"I-Uh-" Yoongi starts, his eyes burning.

"Are you doing alright, bro?" Sunwoo asks then, his voice turning a little serious. "What's wrong?"

Sunwoo was never someone Yoongi disliked. He was alright, not like the others but also not involved enough to know how murky things were anyway. He had a long term girlfriend all throughout high school and often spent all of his free time outside of school and training with her. But Yoongi supposes he also just holds a certain disdain to everyone he'd practiced with.

"My brother's missing," he finally reveals. "Has been for over a month. I've come to Seoul to find him."

“What?” Sunwoo shrieks. “No way.”

“Yeah,” Yoongi says. “That’s why I look like shit.”

“Wait, wait, hold on,” Sunwoo says. “We need to sit down for this.”

Somehow, Yoongi seems to appreciate the new face and voice. Lately it’s just been Jungkook and Hyora, and then the depressing phone calls with his parents that never have any good news and always end on a sad note. There’s only so many times he can hear his mother cry over the phone.

They sit down at a bench that’s in front of some street installation.

“Tell me, now. I’m so sorry,” Sunwoo suggests the moment they sit down.

Yoongi fills him in with the bare minimum information. His brother went missing from his workplace and the cops gave up on the case without a fight. The weird letter, the potential stalker. Yoongi doesn’t mention that they think it’s his ex boyfriend because that would open up too many details of Jimin’s private life that he wouldn’t feel comfortable sharing with a person that is a stranger to Jimin.

“And you’ve been solving this by yourself?” Sunwoo demands, seeming shocked but still highly empathetic. He looks genuinely dismayed, his fingers white where they grip his plastic carrier. The soju bottles inside have long since lost their chilled temperature.

“Well, yeah. Me and Jimin’s new boyfriend,” Yoongi answers. “We’re currently stuck, but I’m working on it.”

”I-”

Sunwoo's phone starts to ring. He gives Yoongi an apologetic look before he answers it.

"Hey. Yeah, yeah, I'm on my way. Sorry for taking so long. Yeah, I got everything."

Yoongi stares at the cobblestone his feet are resting on, eyes bloodshot.

"I'll be there in a few minutes, and I'm bringing someone," Sunwoo says then. "Yeah, bye."

"Yoongi, uh."

Yoongi looks up at him. It's nearly nightfall now, and foot traffic is picking up as more and more people leave their jobs and classes for the day. It feels like life has come to a standstill for Yoongi.

"Why don't you come back with me to my place right now?" Sunwoo suggests sheepishly. "The thing is that I'm actually having a small scene at my apartment. A few close friends and some buddies you know from back home who now also live in Seoul, funnily enough. Would've invited you but I didn't know you were here. We can talk about this to them and we'll all help you out."

Yoongi stares at him. Sunwoo nudges his shoulder.

"C'mon, dude. We're all here for you. Gotta fight for what's important. We can brainstorm and ask if any of them have seen him, circulate your brother's pictures, and we can even put together a small team or something to help out. Don't think too much about it."

"Why?" Yoongi asks.

"Anything for a brother from back home," Sunwoo says. "And you were always nice as fuck. Reserved, but nice. It's kinda weird seeing you this way."

“I don’t know…”

“Yoongi. Let me help. I’m sure they’ll want to help out too.”

Yoongi looks up at the dark sky. The truth is…they’ve hardly found anything in the past three weeks. He’s just been waking up for nothing and heading right back to sleep, actually drifting away if he were to be so lucky. He thinks about what would be waiting for him otherwise - another sad night at home with no result.

This…any extra help…could change things. It *is* uncanny that he’s run into Sunwoo here. Maybe…

“Okay,” Yoongi sighs.

-

Sunwoo happens to live just around the corner.

Yoongi feels awkward as he trails behind him, still holding his fucking groceries. They climb the stairs up to the fourth floor once they reach the apartment building, a quaint one not so different from Jungkook and Jimin’s.

The moment Sunwoo gets the door open, there’s a loud chorus of voices berating Sunwoo for being late and then a resounding wave of shocked exclaims as many of them recognize Yoongi. Sunwoo’s home is a simple studio apartment, perfect for a student with minimalist decor, an open rack of clothes and a single but large window. The boys inside are packed into the space, huddled around a small table that’s overflowing with snacks and half empty soju bottles.

“I ran into him on my way back,” Sunwoo says, grinning. He throws an arm around Yoongi’s shoulder. “Had to bring him home.”

Yoongi is surprised to find that everyone seems to be happy to see him. Some of the people are the creeps he remembers, the others are just acquaintances he used to see in the locker room from other teams and sports, a few seniors and juniors too. Sunwoo was always sociable, so it makes sense that he’d still be in touch with people from their hometown they’d interacted with even in only a sparing capacity. It seems very few of the really seedy sort are here, probably because none of them were smart enough to get into colleges in Seoul.

Yoongi is pulled down to sit, receives a barrage of hands slapping his back, and is poured a drink.

And then, Sunwoo provides context. Explains the situation to everyone. The mood of the evening changes instantly, and Yoongi is somehow weirdly touched that everyone seems to care.

Some of the boys ask about the leads and evidence. Others curse the cops. One asks Yoongi to send him Jimin’s picture so he can circulate it amongst a big online forum he’s on. They discuss and pick apart everything Yoongi knows, but ultimately come out with nothing that he hasn’t thought of already. Some seem genuinely upset, and he receives plenty of consolatory pats which he does his best not to shake off.

“What if it was a hate crime? I mean, I’m not homophobic but I know-”

“Did you check all the nearby dashcam footage?”

“I’m so fucking sorry, bro.”

“It has to be a stalker.”

“Let’s create a group where we can pool in leads. Don’t worry, we’ll all help you find him.”

Yoongi is somehow touched. The reassurance and effort surprises him.

“What if it’s an ex boyfriend?” Someone asks then.

Just as Yoongi is about to answer, the doorbell rings.

Sunwoo groans, standing up and nearly knocking over an open bottle when he grips the table for leverage. His face is red with alcohol and the stress of brainstorming.

“Fucking three hours late,” he curses, stumbling his way to the front door which he opens with some difficulty. “Why’d you even bother to show up, huh? Motherfucker,” he spits at the person just as he sees them.

“Heh. Sorry,” A deep voice responds. It’s familiar in a way that makes Yoongi flinch.

Sunwoo moves out of the way, clearing Yoongi’s line of vision that was already trained on the doorway.

Yoongi is surprised immediately.

It’s Kim Taehyung. From their high school.

Yoongi’s face was already blank, has been for the entire evening, but it steels. He’s never fucking liked Kim Taehyung. Always thought he was nothing but a no good piece of garbage, which he knows he’s right about. He’s dangerous.

Taehyung shucks off his expensive sneakers and walks in, his hands holding a bag full of boxes of fried chicken from some overpriced chain store which seems to be a token of

apology for how late he is. He’s wearing scrubs, and Yoongi almost wants to laugh because he can’t think of someone less suited for a caring role.

His eyes scan over the crowd which yells at him in greeting save for Yoongi.

Eventually, their eyes meet.

Taehyung pauses for a second, expression undecipherable. Surprised, but seemingly also not.

But then, he smiles. He smiles wide, although his eyes don’t curve up the way they naturally should if it were genuine, sharp and cunning in a way Yoongi has hated and been unnerved by ever since he was a child. Taehyung was one of those kids who would kick or hurt other children just because he felt like it and found it fun. He’s cruel, selfish and vindictive, and seeing him sours Yoongi’s mood.

His smile - lips spreading over his perfect teeth in a way that’s menacing if you focus just enough - only seems to keep growing.

“Yoongi. It’s been a long time.”

Yoongi simply stares back, face blank and expression uninspired. Although there’s a slight discomfort that makes the hairs on the back of his neck stand up.

Taehyung only smiles wider.

Chapter End Notes

Hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm.....I wonder what's going to happen next....

And that's the 15th chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 16: Nightingale

Chapter Notes

Here's the sixteenth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

This chapter is VERY graphic and can be skipped if you're sensitive to violence, suicidal themes and any of the concepts in the tags. I cannot emphasize this enough!!! Pls skip if you need to!! I'll put a chapter summary in the ending notes so you can just navigate to that if you need to to find out what happened.

I hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Taehyung’s got a new home.

Calling it a house doesn’t quite feel right; it feels and looks like a home. And it’s not an apartment, Jimin thinks. It’s too big to be one and he knows with some amount of certainty that the front door leads directly outside. Because when he presses his ear to it, he can hear the sounds of traffic and people walking by.

Maybe this is a segmented house. It’s large and there are 3 bedrooms. When Jimin jumps, the floor doesn’t feel hollow.

Jimin isn't allowed to touch the door handles. Or stand anywhere close to the windows. In fact, he isn't even allowed to step beyond the foyer anymore. The last time Taehyung caught him listening through the front door, he put a collar on him, strapped tightly to his neck with a lock. And the next time Jimin tried to approach the front door, during his second day here, he was stunned by a bolt of electric current surging through his body.

"I wish you wouldn't choose to learn everything the hard way, baby," Taehyung had said to him, watching him writhe on the floor. The moment Jimin managed to scramble out of the foyer and into the living room, the shocks subsided. And Taehyung tugged on the collar, forcing eye contact.

"Told the pet shop owner this was for my puppy Mimi," he laughed, eyes crinkling up. He thumbed at the soft pink leather coating the hard wires underneath, the four letters brandished in pearly white letters on the front. "If you're good, it won't hurt you."

Jimin stared up at him, chest heaving, tear tracks quickly drying on his face. *I hate you*, he'd screamed in his mind.

But Taehyung had picked him up then, cradling him against his chest like he really was a puppy, and held him and comforted him. He rubbed his back and stroked his hair, telling Jimin all kinds of nice things in his low, stable voice. And for a little while, Jimin asked himself whether fighting back was worth it if this was the reward. Being held and praised and coddled by the person who he'd spent every breath wishing to be cherished by. His deep voice warmed his heart, but couldn't stop his shivering because reality loomed over his shoulder.

Jimin's attempts to fight back are sporadic. But it's hard to maintain any sort of resolve when he's met with violence. Whenever he's hit, or something happens, he feels his mind start to shrink. Any rebellious thoughts are blanketed and overshadowed by fear, because the pain becomes too loud. And he hates the way he can feel the conditioning take place. He feels complacent in his own downfall.

It's just been a few days, he thinks. It can't be more. Or maybe it's been much longer and he just can't tell.

Maybe he is a little puppy. The reward and punishment system seems to be working.

His first day there, when he'd awoken in his new bed, the first thing he'd done was scream his lungs out and attack Taehyung. It happened in an instant, so fast he couldn't see it coming. But the ringing of his ears and the deep, sharp ache of his skull, as well as the feeling of being thrown to the floor made him realize enough. If he's good, he won't be hurt.

Now, Jimin's too scared to even approach the corridor that leads to the front door. And he knows what to say and what not to say to Taehyung. Cooperating is ultimately the best move, so Taehyung thinks he's got him when in reality, Jimin is plotting an escape route in his mind. His mind that already seems to be dying.

He's always had a weak constitution. Easily overwhelmed by things when younger and even now, both emotional and physical. A simple bruise would stick and linger for days, common colds weighing him down for months like a chronic tragedy. He'd see a sad movie and find himself crying whenever he thought about it for months after, remember something hurtful that someone said to him years ago and weep like the wounds were fresh. They were always fresh, raw and scathing. So easy to start bleeding once more. His body and brain simply seemed unable to patch himself back together, and now Jimin thinks that he's just a thin sheet of fabric with several holes ripped into him, ones that will only grow with time and rip him apart into tiny little pieces that can't ever be put back together.

But still, he tries. Jimin's a fighter. He always has been. He tries despite it all.

Taehyung's new home looks like it's for a family. He told Jimin that he moved and chose this place specifically for the both of them to live in.

There are 3 bedrooms. Quite expensive for Seoul, but Jimin knows that Taehyung can afford it. One is their bedroom. It's the biggest space, with a king size bed and grey sheets. The entire space looks and smells like it belongs to Taehyung, his usual cologne and aftershave strong against Jimin's nose. The first time Jimin smelled it when he'd walked in there, his knees nearly buckled because it felt like he was travelling through time. There's a dressing table and a computer table, with a locked PC. Taehyung told him that the system would notify him if Jimin ever tried to access it. The attached bathroom is also large, and there's no mirror.

The second bedroom is locked. Taehyung says he'll show him what's in there if he's good, and Jimin is scared. The third bedroom seems to be a home gym and mini library, also locked when Taehyung isn't home. The rest of the house is a guest bathroom, the large kitchen and luxurious living room. All sharp objects are in a drawer locked with a combination padlock. All the windows are locked too, but Jimin doesn't approach them because the far lines of the house trigger the collar.

Taehyung has obviously planned this for a long time, which in itself terrifies Jimin. It feels long term, which probably means that Taehyung isn't going to do something rash like kill him. But when he's angry, it seems even he doesn't know what he's doing. And Jimin doesn't have the confidence to say that he won't end up killing Jimin during one of his episodes.

Now, Jimin's sitting on the sofa. Taehyung isn't home.

He wonders if Yoongi came to Seoul. Is he searching for him? Is Jungkook?

"Yoongi hyung," he says aloud, his voice scratchy after what must be days of unuse. It feels like there are flies caught in his throat. "Jeon Jungkook."

Jimin thinks about his classes, and he thinks about his friends. He thinks about whether Yeonjin will have to cover his shift now that he can't go to work. He thinks about his parents. He has to keep thinking.

If he leaves, Taehyung will show his pictures to all of them.

So he has to find those pictures and delete them. But for that, he needs Taehyung's phone… and he also needs access to his cloud. But the computer is locked, and Taehyung always has his phone with him. Maybe when Taehyung is asleep…

But even if he deletes those photos, how will he escape? He'll be electrocuted if he attempts to leave the property. Maybe if he manages to unlock Taehyung's computer, he'll message Jungkook or his hyung…

“I’m sorry, hyung,” Jimin says. He’s always been a burden to Yoongi. His hyung definitely doesn’t need this right now, not when he already has so much on his plate. So does Jungkook. He feels terrible for making him worry when he’s already balancing so much.

Jimin feels manic. He probably looks manic too, is keenly aware of the bruises decorating his body in a rainbow of splotches. They’re starting to heal now, but it’s infinitely harder now to keep track of what words and actions trigger Taehyung’s blackout rage. His eyes feel blown out and glazed. It’s becoming harder and harder to be sane.

He thought Taehyung didn’t care, but the other man seems to have permanently changed, his mind altered drastically in the year they spent apart.

Jimin has to survive.

-

Taehyung comes home a few hours later.

Jimin’s watching TV when he does. It’s a smart TV with a cable set up too, and Jimin switched to Netflix after watching the news for hours only to confirm that no one is talking about his disappearance. Now, he’s watching some brain numbing animated show with lots of colours, stimulation and sound. But the entire time, his mind was on which scenario would happen quicker if he just repeatedly bashed his head into the wide screen TV; his death or the procurement of a shard that he could use to fight his way out.

Taehyung walks over to him. He looks freshly showered, so he’s either back from the gym or from practicals. Jimin keeps his eyes on the TV screen, trying not to stiffen up as Taehyung comes to a halt a few feet away from him.

“Stand up.” His tone is blank.

Jimin stands up on shaky feet, trying to bite down the cramps pulsing up his legs due to the way he was sitting for so long.

“Come over here and say hello to me. Welcome me home.”

Jimin keeps his eyes on the floor, small feet pattering lightly as he takes the few steps he needs to get to Taehyung. He stops a foot away from him.

“Hello,” he greets, his voice meek. “Welcome home.”

He jumps when Taehyung grabs his hips and yanks him closer, nearly making him fall as he trips over his own feet. His body’s pressed flush against Taehyung’s, and the other man’s large hands travel upward to firmly take hold of either side of his waist.

“Say hello, *properly*.”

Jimin leans up on his tip toes and presses a brief close mouthed kiss to Taehyung’s cheek. He’s about to pull back when Taehyung grips his jaw and kisses him fully, although it’s short too. It should feel disgusting, but it doesn’t. Jimin can’t understand it. It’s instinctual, like muscle memory, kissing Taehyung. He’s done it so many times before. It should put him off after everything that’s happened. But right now, it doesn’t. It feels like everything is just how it used to be. He lets himself dissociate and drift off whenever they kiss. That way his heart won’t ache when he thinks about Jungkook. So that it doesn’t feel like cheating.

“What were you up to all day?” Taehyung asks, pecking him once more. “I know you’ve been good. I didn’t get any notifications from your little collar.”

“I’ve been watching TV.”

“Did you eat anything?”

“I ate an apple.”

“Just one?”

“Yes.”

“Would you eat another if I asked you to?”

“Yes.”

Taehyung smiles.

“Sometimes I wonder if I’m dreaming,” he says. “You know, I always imagined this. A latent yet real scenario in my head. That you’d always be here at home waiting for me. Pretty and obedient, just like this. I’ve been thinking about this since we were in school. That I’d go out and work, and come home to you. You’d always be right here, waiting for me. Like my little housewife.”

Jimin doesn’t respond, keeping his eyes on the floor.

“I’m glad you are settling in now,” Taehyung continues. “This is what’s best for the both of us. I finally saw you, realized your value. It’s time for you to remember mine now.”

“What happens once you graduate?” Jimin asks then, looking up. “What about your residency, and internships? You’ll take me along with you wherever you go?”

“Oh, that’s an easy question. The basic answer is yes. Wherever I go, you’ll be tucked into one of my suitcases.”

“And the detailed answer?”

“Do you really want to know right now?”

Jimin nods. He should look up at Taehyung, but he can’t. He’s so afraid. The last time he’d looked Taehyung in the eyes he went nearly hysterical with terror.

“Hmmm,” Taehyung thinks aloud. His deep voice echoes in Jimin’s ears. “Why don’t you try to piece it together yourself?”

“Are you going to keep me here forever?” Jimin asks. It’s all he wants to know.

“Yes.”

Jimin sobs then.

“But why? You’ve never loved me.”

“Of course I have.”

Something snaps and starts to bleed inside Jimin’s psyche. It feels acidic and scorching, fueling a surge of anger and heartbreak deep within him.

“If you did, you wouldn’t have cheated on me. You w-wouldn’t have done it,” he says, finally looking up at Taehyung. The other man’s eyes are dark, and his face is blank as he regards Jimin. Jimin feels hot tears spill over his lash line, mouth trembling as he foolishly builds resolve. “You’re just obsessed with me for a reason I can’t pinpoint. You’ll get bored of me soon because I was never able to hold your interest to begin with. What’ll you do with me then? You’ll just kill me. I know you will.”

Even as he says it, he knows it's hopeless. A futile attempt. He's already tried to talk sense into Taehyung. It always ended the same way, and he predicts it will now too. But he has to try. He has to keep trying.

Taehyung laughs.

"Out of everyone, you are the *only* one who has ever been able to hold my interest. And now, I won't stray. I did before…but now, no one really does it for me anymore. You are going to stay here with me, and you'll learn to be happy. You will, because I can make you happy. I've done it before, 3 years of it. I'll love you like you want me to. I'll be loyal. And at the end of it all, I'm just keeping a promise I made to you a while ago."

"What promise?" Jimin asks, his head spinning. His mind feels like a muddled mess.

"I promised to always love you and not forget you. I haven't broken it and I don't intend to either," Taehyung elaborates. "Back at home. Don't tell me you forgot about that."

"You also promised me you wouldn't hurt me, remember that?" Jimin snaps. "All of this is so warped in your head. You strangled me a few days ago. You think that's normal?"

"I did what I had to. No love is perfect."

Jimin laughs then, bitter, his eyes firing up. "Jungkook-"

Taehyung punches him in the jaw, and wrenches a hand in his hair to keep him upright before he falls from the force of it. Jimin's mouth pools with blood and his ears start to ring, stars dotting across his vision. He stumbles on his feet. His eyes blow wide, shocked even though it's far from being the first time. It never fails to overwhelm him entirely.

“Don’t fucking say his name,” Taehyung warns, voice calm although it shakes slightly with barely restrained anger. “If you say it again, it won’t just be you next time. It’ll be him. I’ll gut him like a pig and feed his entrails to you. I don’t want to hear you say his name. You aren’t allowed to think about him. I’ve told you this so many times before. You can’t think about anyone else but me. You’re lucky I haven’t killed you for being with him.”

Jimin’s breathing is ragged and he’s rendered silent. Just like all the times before. He distantly realizes that he’s crying. His head throbs, the pain emanating from his jaw wracking his skull. He’s pretty sure he bit his tongue.

“Why do you keep insisting on fucking this up, huh?” Taehyung demands. “Why do you keep trying to piss me off? You were good the past two days. Did you get punished then? No. You keep fucking pushing it,” Taehyung spits, jerking his head several times to punctuate the last few words. Jimin whimpers, squeezing his eyes shut.

Jimin balls his fists into Taehyung’s t-shirt, a silent plea. Also because he thinks he might break if he doesn’t have something to hold onto.

The other man eventually calms down, his breathing starting to slow. He releases Jimin’s hair, and Jimin forces himself to bite down the sharp surge of pain in his head. Taehyung takes hold of Jimin’s face then, cupping his cheeks and angling his head upward.

“Why do you keep making me do this to you?” He asks, wiping away his tears. He hugs Jimin then, cradling the back of his head. Jimin sighs into his neck, fists still balled tightly into Taehyung’s shirt. He’s shaking and his tears blot the fabric. As does the red tinged drool leaking from his mouth.

Taehyung turns his head slightly to kiss Jimin’s cheek, hugging him tighter. Jimin’s teeth still chatter, and he hates how the skin to skin contact somehow makes his breathing and heartbeat start to slow down. Taehyung rubs his back and strokes his hair, whispering to Jimin that he loves him. That it doesn’t have to be this way. That if Jimin listens, he can be happy.

He hates the way his body and brain reacts to Taehyung. Overtly, he knows this is wrong. But instinctually, he craves him. Maybe it’s because being loved tenderly by Taehyung helps heal the wounds carved by his gaping insecurities. It silences the voices that tell him he isn’t good enough for Taehyung to love. It feels heavenly for the parts of him that loved and craved

Taehyung for years. His body feels like it was made for Taehyung's touch, because it's all it knew until a little while ago. It's confusing, disorienting and sharply panic-inducing.

Everything, from Taehyung's natural scent to his long hair tickling Jimin's skin, to the sound of his voice and the familiar slope of his nose; it's everything he hates and wants all at once. Maybe it's a twisted way of seeking comfort, an equation that adds up in the scorched synapses of his brain. So what if Taehyung is why he's hurting? Equally so, he's also his only reprieve.

And if he's good…

Taehyung won't be scary. He won't….

"It'll only be difficult if you make it difficult," Taehyung says, his voice deep against Jimin's ear. "Just let yourself be happy. All you need to do is forget your past and focus on what I've built for us."

Taehyung is charismatic. He knows how to use his words, and he knows how to create any desired effect on people. He's manipulative, and he lies better than he breathes. He's so good at it that despite it all, Jimin actually wonders if listening to Taehyung would be such a bad idea.

It's wrong. He knows it's wrong. It's so wrong.

He should be stronger. But…

Right now, he can't. So he lets Taehyung kiss him, biting down the pain in his jaw. Anything to protect his own sanity and being, to not instigate Taehyung again. He can't handle more right now.

"My mouth is bloody," Jimin says, pulling away, somehow concerned that it'll put Taehyung off. He says it like it's his own fault, a shortcoming on his part.

“It’s your blood. I don’t care,” Taehyung responds, kissing him once more. His arms around him feel warm and comfortable, supporting all of his weight because Jimin feels too tired to carry himself anymore.

When Taehyung pulls away, he smiles at Jimin. He brings a hand up to push some of his hair behind his ear, then cradling his cheek. Jimin’s heart beats faster, almost as if he was 18 again. It feels overt and cloying, the sensation. Like he really is falling through time. The blood is dried up on his face and chin now, but there’s still a cold chill inside of him that’s been momentarily forgotten. His mind is slowly starting to crack, he thinks, if he’s able to find comfort in this.

“Did you see what I brought with me when I walked in here?” Taehyung asks. “You weren’t looking at me, so I know you didn’t.”

Jimin shakes his head.

Taehyung lets go of his face then, walking to stand behind him and covering his eyes. A single hand is large enough to cover both eyes, and he loops his other arm round Jimin’s waist to guide him. He walks them forward, and Jimin clutches at Taehyung’s forearms for support.

When Taehyung lifts his hand, Jimin opens his hands to see a paper bag on the little table by the foyer.

“Go see what’s inside,” Taehyung prompts, squeezing his waist.

Jimin shakes his head, closing his eyes once more. He doesn’t want to.

“Why not?” Taehyung asks, leaning down to nip at the shell of his ear.

“My c-collar…it’ll go off if I get too close-”

“So what?”

“It’ll h-hurt.”

“If it does, it’ll be worth it. There’s something special inside for you, which I went a long way to get.”

Jimin stays silent, shifting on his feet. He gnaws at his bottom lip, anxious.

“You don’t want my efforts to go to waste, do you?”

Jimin shakes his head. Taehyung kisses his cheek, right over where he’d hit him, and Jimin jerks at the sudden rush of pain. It triggers a fresh wave of involuntary tears.

“Go on.”

Taehyung unwinds himself around Jimin, giving him the space he needs to step forward.

Jimin does step forward, trembling, scared beyond his wits. He keeps bracing for it the closer he gets to the table and the paper bag; for the jolt of electricity. He can’t describe how painful it is.

He comes to a stop as far away as he can, outstretching his arm to reach for the bag. He manages to take hold of it and sighs with relief, bringing it toward himself and holding it against his chest, immediately scrambling backward to safe waters. Taehyung’s pressed to his back again.

“Take it to the table and see what’s inside.”

Jimin does, moving it to the wooden dining table with hurried footsteps, eager to get away from the foyer.

Jimin opens the bag with careful fingers, peeking inside. He takes out a plastic container, opening the lid to find a massive portion of spaghetti and fried chicken, enough for two. It smells heavenly. The next container is a box of pastries and cupcakes. And the third item is a bubble tea to go, from his cafe. It’s in the salted caramel and chocolate flavour, the drink Jimin always makes for himself.

“I wanted to give you a surprise, make you happy,” Taehyung whispers in his ear.

All of these dishes are from his favourite restaurants in Seoul, down to the branch. New memories and experiences Jimin cultivated after Taehyung, because he couldn’t bear a single reminder of anything that once was.

“How did you know I liked these places…?”

Jimin feels the rumble of Taehyung’s chuckle behind his back.

“Been watchin’ you long enough.”

Jimin stays silent, and Taehyung strokes his tummy, poking and prodding at his skin.

“See? There’s nothing in here. You need to eat,” he says, groping at the thin skin. “Are you happy?”

“Yes. Thank you,” Jimin says meekly.

Taehyung leans downward to peck him once more, before stepping back to pull a chair out for Jimin to sit. Jimin does sit, watching as Taehyung grabs two plates and sets the table.

“Where’s your drink?” Jimin asks. There’s just one cup of bubble tea.

“I’m gonna make myself a protein shake. I’m getting back into swimming, so I need to build my strength,” Taehyung answers, his back to Jimin as he starts to gather the ingredients for his drink. Jimin watches and keeps note of where everything is. He hasn’t fiddled around the kitchen much. He sees that the big jar of protein powder is kept in the cabinet above the microwave.

“You stopped swimming?”

“I stopped a lot of things,” Taehyung answers vaguely. His back looks broad, shoulders wider than Jimin remembers. He’s taller too, and seems to have become stronger. Taehyung’s grown, they both have. Jimin stares at the veins visible in his arms, then at his long fingers, and he feels something in his tummy flip. Fear or attraction, he isn’t sure.

Those are the same hands he hits you with, he tells himself in an attempt to come back down to reality. These feelings scare him. He remembers Taehyung’s words from his voice note.

You just like picking guys bigger than you because you want to be thrown around. You loved the way I treated you, don’t lie. And what I also know is that you need to be fucked seven ways to Sunday to get your brain working right.

It’s not true. He knows it’s not true.

What’s happening to him? He stares down at the meal in front of him. Maybe his brain is attempting to romanticize the situation as a way of self preservation. And he’s not sure if he’s entirely opposed to it, because it might be the only thing keeping him sane. Keeping him alive. But it’s unnerving and unsettling, because it’s wrong. Jimin needs to keep fighting.

But isn't this a way of fighting too? If Jimin keeps protesting, and rejecting Taehyung's efforts, he'll just wind up dead, or damaged irreparably. He loses then too.

He just needs to keep his head above water. He needs to remember what's right, and never forget what's real.

The line is just growing blurry. Jimin needs to stay aware.

Soon, Taehyung joins him. And they eat together. Jimin forces down as many forkfuls as he can, even though it all tastes like ash due to his appetite that's been lost. But he can feel his body thanking him, because the cramping of his empty stomach had grown too painful. He does feel a little more energized, and Taehyung smiles at him and strokes his hair as he eats dessert too. When he bites into a cupcake, Taehyung kisses off a bit of frosting that clings to his upper lip. And he rubs his back and kisses his forehead as he drinks his bubble tea, holding it like a baby would a sippy cup. The casual affection makes him feel dizzy, because he would yearn, *bleed* for it when they were together.

The rest of the evening is uneventful. Taehyung doesn't let Jimin do any of the clearing up, disposing of the containers, loading the dishwasher and wiping the table clean all by himself. He then leads Jimin to the sofa, where they sit together to watch a movie.

It's playing for around 5 minutes when Taehyung gently cups Jimin's face, turning it toward him.

Jimin looks at him, trying his hardest not to squeeze his eyes shut with fear. Every unexpected touch paralyzes him.

"I'm sorry I hurt you," Taehyung says. "But I'm not sorry for why I did it. Every day can be like this if you just give in and listen to me."

After a few seconds of silence, Taehyung nudges his face, raising an eyebrow.

“Respond. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” Jimin responds meekly.

Taehyung grins then, like they’ve patched up. He wraps his arms around Jimin and proceeds to cuddle him, running his fingers up and underneath his t-shirt. It’s Taehyung’s, all he wears are Taehyung’s clothes. Jimin seizes up but the other man ignores it, opting to watch the movie. Jimin can’t focus on it, but he closes his eyes.

The underlying lesson is clear.

If he’s good, he won’t be hurt.

-

Jimin tells Taehyung he’s bored, so Taehyung buys him a box of blunt crayons and a stack of thick expensive blank paper. The crayons are expensive too, in a large decorated tin box with over 50 unique shades.

He watches as Jimin doodles and draws, smiling at him where he sits kneeling on the floor by his feet. Ever so often, Taehyung will reach down to stroke his hair like you would pet a dog.

Jimin keeps drawing. He draws trees and flowers and farm animals. He draws islands, beaches and forests. He draws sunsets and riversides and houses and anything that isn’t *here*.

When Taehyung leaves the house a little later, Jimin waits 30 minutes to check whether he’s gone for a short while or a long time. He’s started to keep a track of how far the usual destinations are based on the time Taehyung takes to return; it’s not more than 15 minutes for the grocery store, and the pharmacy is a 20 minute round trip at the max.

When the 30 minutes ends, Jimin starts to write onto the paper.

Hello, my name is Park Jimin. I have been kidnapped and need help. Please look for Kim Taehyung's address, that's where I am right now. He is a medical student at Korea University. Please call the police, I urgently need your help.

When it's ready, letters barely legible given the thick strokes of the crayon, Jimin stands up.

He's already shaking with nerves, head throbbing.

He grabs the paper and slowly approaches the foyer. It's long and narrow, the foyer, the front door significantly out of reach from the farthest line Jimin can stand at. If he steps even an inch further, it will trigger the collar.

Jimin carefully sits down onto the floor, outstretching his legs into the space and leaning back so his neck, where the collar is, isn't anywhere close to the invisible border. It feels like there's wool between his ears.

Jimin inches his body forward, lifting his hips to extend more of his lower body into the foyer. His breathing is shaky yet he's dead silent, focusing on doing this as quickly as possible.

By the time Jimin's on his back, everything below his mid-spine extended into the foyer, his feet are only a tiny bit away from the front door. Jimin quickly scoots backward and decides to proceed with the next testing phase. He runs to the bedroom and rifles through Taehyung's closet for a clothes hanger, grabbing one and running back to the living room.

Jimin does the same exercise, but sees if he can reach the front door by pushing the hanger with his feet, using it to extend his height. It works, the edge of it pressing against the gap between the door and the floor.

Now, it's time.

Jimin sits back and slides the sheet of paper into the foyer. And then, he lays back down and attempts to push it through the gap beneath the door with his feet and the hanger.

His teeth chatter, a cold sweat coating his temples and the back of his neck. He's anxious, wracked with nerves.

It works for the most part.

Until the paper bends with the force and gets stuck in the gap. Jimin gasps, drawing in a sharp breath.

"Oh no!"

He tries to push the hanger further and wedge it under the door, but the thick wood of it is too big to get in there and straighten the paper out. Jimin desperately tries for the next several minutes, already beside himself with fright.

"No no no, please! No!" He sobs when it finally sinks in that it can't be fixed.

It's stuck, and Jimin can't take it out. It'll be waiting right there for Taehyung to find when he gets back, as soon as he opens the door. And when he reads it, and figures out what Jimin was trying to do, he'll be livid and hurt him. Jimin's made so much progress, and has stayed relatively unscathed for the past few days.

Jimin feels himself start to go nearly hysterical, sobbing with heaving breaths. He feels stricken with grief for himself, and he yanks at his own hair, frustrated at his own stupidity to even try to pull this off.

He knows he has two options.

The first. He lets Taehyung find it and takes whatever's coming. He'll have to steel himself for it and if he starts now, maybe it'll hurt less when it actually happens.

Or, the second. He walks into the foyer himself and takes it out with his fingers. He knows they'll fit.

Jimin cries even louder, terrified beyond belief.

He paces around the living room for a while, trying to figure out what to do. What the best course of action is, the one with the least punishment. If he forces himself to do it, he'll have to put up with the shocks. It's a long shot that he'll even be able to think straight and keep moving while it's happening to him, let alone coordinate his body to bend and reach and retrieve the paper. It'll hurt indescribably, and the exposed conductors that touch his skin will burn him if it's triggered for too long.

Or, the alternative.

Taehyung might really kill him. He'd see this as the biggest betrayal. Jimin can't predict what might happen. Just the thought of it makes him feel faint with fear. He can't handle more, and has barely recovered from the last time.

He doesn't know what he'll do, but he knows it'll be bad. It gets worse every time, like Taehyung breaks down a different wall each time he hurts him. The more walls he breaks, the harder and more painful it gets. Like raising the bar each time, because it becomes easier for Taehyung. Jimin's come too close to having broken bones, and this might be the pivotal incident to finally make it happen.

Jimin can't take that chance. Not because he's scared of the pain, but because his mind will shatter. It's barely held together by a thread as is.

If he forces himself into the foyer, he'll at least know what he's getting into.

He has no other choice, and needs to hurry because his anxious mind tells him Taehyung might arrive any moment now.

Jimin takes off his t-shirt, balls it, and stuffs it into his mouth so he won't accidentally bite his tongue when the shocks start. His tears slip down his cheeks and soak the fabric anyway.

He'll hurry through it. Run, bend, grab the paper, and run back. It should be done in five seconds. Jimin's toes dig into the wooden floorboards that cliff off to the smooth granite tiles of the foyer.

Jimin balls his fists, and counts to three.

When he's done, he steels himself and darts into action, too headstrong to let his mind scare him into stopping.

The moment he crosses the invisible line, he feels it. It leaves him breathless, the first shock, making him shoot up straight and bite down onto the cloth. He screams through it, his body spasming with each white hot wave of pain. It wracks its way through his system and he can hear it, the conductors scorching hot where they press into his neck.

But Jimin, he fights.

Even though it takes considerably longer than he'd hoped, he lets himself fall to the ground, shoving his fingers into the door gap blindly. His vision is hazy, and his back bows with every surge of current. Somehow, he manages to grab the paper, and scrapes his hand on the underside of the door as he yanks it out.

Jimin turns around, sluggish as he's laying down, and vaults himself back into the house.

By this time, he's shaking. His head is spinning, and his skull aches with how hard he was biting down on the cloth. The pain from the shocks subsides but his nerves feel fried, another

raw sort of pain coursing through his veins. He'll have to make an excuse to tell Taehyung, because he knows the other man gets notifications every time the collar is triggered.

And Jimin, he can feel the way the metal conductors on the inside of the collar are stuck to his skin, so hot they fused themselves to him. Every little movement makes his damaged and burned skin hurt, tugging on the metal. He bites down a sob, screwing his eyes shut, as he takes in what suddenly now seems to be a pointless victory.

Jimin can't stand, so he crawls. He crawls his way through the house, his knuckles white where they clutch onto the paper. Jimin stops when he reaches the kitchen, reaching up and grabbing the countertop for support as he attempts to stand on wobbly knees. It works, and he leans over it so he won't fall.

Jimin tears the paper into the tiny little pieces and dumps them in the kitchen sink, turning on the tap. He watches as the water soaks the paper and then makes it nearly dissolve, fragments of it slowly swirling down the grated drain. He watches till there's no evidence left.

Then, he sinks to the floor, his chest heaving.

Jimin feels stupid. He realizes the major flaws in this idea that didn't occur to him earlier, that the paper would just stop outside the front door due to lack of momentum. There's no guarantee that there are people walking by outside, or that any of them would've seen it and picked it up. There's no guarantee that it wouldn't sit right there for Taehyung to pick up himself. Despite the burns and the pain, this was the best outcome.

He's not going to be stupid enough to try something like this again. Even though giving up is exactly what Taehyung wants.

He has to figure out another way.

But why does it feel impossible? Taehyung's got him trapped. He's got his hands tied.

Jimin slowly walks away from the kitchen and toward the bedroom on shaky legs, returning the hanger to Taehyung's closet. Then, he lies down onto the bed and stares up at the ceiling. The collar tugs at his skin and it hurts, but he pays it no mind.

If you look at the apartment, there isn't a single hint of Jimin beyond his own overt presence. There are none of his belongings here. It just looks like Taehyung's house.

Jimin really is a piece of furniture, he supposes. His eyes drift to the locked door he can see in the corridor outside, once again wondering what's inside.

He doesn't have the energy to think anymore. He feels drained in every way.

Jimin's eyes drift shut, and he falls deeply asleep.

He wakes up hours later to the feeling of Taehyung running his fingers through his hair. Jimin opens his eyes, and finds the other man looking right at him. He still feels dazed.

The first thing he notices is that Taehyung's eyes aren't angry, so he immediately relaxes. There's a light smile on his face. Taehyung's other hand rubs his bare flank affectionately. Jimin realizes he forgot to put his t-shirt back on. There are goosebumps all over his body from the strong air conditioning.

"Hey, baby," Taehyung greets. "Slept well?"

"Yes."

Taehyung's dressed in a shirt and pants, and his hair is slicked back. He smiles lightly at Jimin's response, then brings his fingers up to trace Jimin's features.

"You want to tell me why the collar went off sixteen times today?"

Sixteen times? Jimin gulps. It's a higher number than he'd anticipated but then again, he wasn't really present enough to keep count.

"I tripped and fell into the foyer. Had trouble getting up because each shock made me fall again," Jimin answers, having thought this up in advance.

"Hmmm," Taehyung responds, face blank. Jimin has no idea whether he believes him or not, but this is all he's got. "You're hurting, aren't you? I can smell burnt flesh."

Jimin nods, because it's true.

"Let me patch you up," Taehyung says before he stands up, leaving the bedroom. Jimin sighs with relief because Taehyung dropped the topic of the collar quicker than he'd expected. Maybe he's starting to trust Jimin more now.

Taehyung comes back with a few tubes and a translucent box that Jimin can't quite see the inside of. He tells Jimin to turn around, and when he unclasps the collar, Jimin whimpers and cries out as his raw skin gets tugged. The pain bites, loud in his brain.

"Good thing I'm a med student, huh," Taehyung says mostly to himself. Jimin closes his eyes when a scalpel darts into his vision, and draws in a sharp breath as he feels Taehyung forcibly separate his skin from the collar. It hurts, but it feels like nothing new. Jimin is just thankful to be alive and safe. He'll take everything that happened today to the grave.

When Taehyung removes the collar, Jimin almost feels naked.

It was heavy, but it seemed he'd grown used to it over the past few…he isn't sure. He can still feel its phantom presence, and the sudden lack of weight feels odd and near uncomfortable. Still, Jimin sits patiently as Taehyung cleans the wounds, before he applies an ointment and dresses the wounds with some gauze. Jimin keeps his eyes pressed closed the entire time.

“You wanna know what I did today?” Taehyung asks. He doesn’t wait for a response. “I had a meeting with the faculty of the medical department. That’s why I’m dressed formally. They’re impressed by the improvement of my performance over the past while. And they asked me what changed. I wish I could tell them it was you. I just said that I got my head back in the game. I’m even doing better at swimming.”

Jimin doesn’t respond.

Taehyung eventually finishes up, and puts all of the supplies back into the box. Jimin takes a look and sees a host of essential medication and items in there. Taehyung closes it shut and leaves, taking the box with him to keep it away.

When he returns, he lifts Jimin’s face up with a firm finger on his chin, forcing eye contact.

“The moment you heal, I’ll put the collar back on. And don’t think I don’t have other ways of finding out if you’re up to no good. I’m going to trust you for now.”

Jimin nods, feeling dead inside. He wonders if their relationship now, this new equation between them, matches up to what Taehyung imagined in his head. Jimin is a far cry from what he used to be, and he sticks by what he said earlier the day they finally ended things. Too much has happened for it to stay the same. And too much time has followed since. If the cheating didn’t do it, the filming of himself with other people did. And if that didn’t do it, Jimin still bears the emotional scars from the night at the art rave. He’ll never *ever* be able to forget it. The way he felt his chest give in, the hysterical fear that dawned on him the moment he’d realized what Taehyung had done. He can’t forget it, even if he wants to. All of these moments have imprinted themselves into his psyche, an irreversible reaction.

Taehyung hits him and controls him like it’s his birthright, like he has that sort of jurisdiction over Jimin.

And Jimin, right now, can’t stop him. He’s too weak. He can’t best Taehyung in a fight, there’s no chance. What he can do is outsmart him, but his current conditions are so stringent that finding any sort of leeway feels impossible.

But Jimin owes it to himself to keep trying. To not resign himself to this.

“Answer me.”

Jimin snaps out of his stupor.

“Yes, Tae. I understand.”

“Tae,” Taehyung repeats, the corners of his mouth quirking up a smidge. He huffs a small laugh. “Have you ever wondered why I don’t make you call me Hyung? Even though I’m older than you?”

Jimin stays silent, his mind blank. He has no idea. Taehyung leans down and closer, his face barely a few inches away from Jimin’s. His lips pull back into a sneer.

“Because that’s what you call your piece of shit brother, Yoongi. I didn’t want to be in the same category as him. Hearing you call me that when we fuck…heh…it fucking disgusted me. Because you call him the same thing. I’m way better than him. I’m pretty sure I fuck better than him anyway…not that you would know. Or would you?”

Jimin is speechless.

“Yoongi hyung,” Taehyung mocks in a moan, making his voice breathy and high. It’s near pornographic.

Jimin’s face steels, his jaw hardening. He can’t believe what Taehyung’s insinuating.

The anger must be obvious on his face because Taehyung laughs, grabbing his face and roughly squeezing his cheeks together. His thumb digs into the bruise on his jaw from the hit

a while ago, sending a jolt of pain up Jimin's spine.

"This fucking face of yours," Taehyung chuckles although his eyes seem furious. "Have you ever wondered why I always go for your face? It's because I want to wipe out this fucking look you have. It pisses me off, drives me crazy with rage. I can't bear the way you look at me. It's like you feel that you have the authority to be displeased with anything I say or do when you don't. You're mine. I'll fucking punch this look off your face as many times as I need to, to get rid of it permanently."

Jimin starts to tear up again.

Taehyung grips his face harder, the smile disappearing off his features.

"Stop looking at me like that. You're asking for it."

Jimin doesn't know what he's supposed to do. He can't not look upset. He tries to smoothen out his expression but it doesn't work. A tear slips out of his eye.

Taehyung slaps him across the face, the sear of it sharp but not hard enough to trigger an ache. But he also knows that it'll only get worse if this doesn't end soon. His mind starts to shrink the way it always does.

"Gimme a smile. C'mon," Taehyung prods, seeming wound up, his face tight. "Don't look at me like that. Like I'm doing something wrong. Stop it."

Jimin tries, but he can't. He can't take slander against Yoongi, and even hearing what Taehyung was insinuating makes him sick to his stomach. He's scared. He doesn't know they got into this situation. He doesn't know what he did this time and he doesn't know how to fix it.

Taehyung keeps speaking.

“Stop crying, unless you’re trying to turn me on. Give me a smile. Now.”

His words feel like a slap to the face.

Jimin’s mind feels very far away. He’s horrified, has been for a long time. He once again questions how stupid he had to be to get involved with Taehyung in the first place. To stay involved with him for nearly 3 years despite all the red flags. He feels it now in a way he can’t ignore. He feels violated by the things Taehyung is saying. He just keeps crying.

His heart breaks.

“You’re getting turned on because I’m u-upset?” Jimin asks, his features crumpling into a sob. “How could you say something like that?”

Taehyung seems almost caught off guard. His eyes widen slightly.

“It’s enough that you’re keeping me here and hurting me…but to be so cruel…” Jimin continues. “After how much I’ve loved you. You expect me to just smile?”

“Jimin-”

“You don’t care about me.”

The menacing glint in Taehyung’s eyes disappears. Jimin, unknowingly, has managed to escape another episode.

“Of course I care about you,” Taehyung says, like it’s the most obvious thing in the world. “You know I do.”

“If you did, you wouldn’t feel happy when I’m upset!” Jimin sobs. “How do you expect me to be happy when you keep saying and doing vile things to me…how could you say that and expect me to smile?”

“No, I just-” Taehyung responds, urged. “I just said that because I was mad.”

Jimin doesn’t respond, his mind reeling.

“I said it because you cry whenever we have sex…or when you used to, I always found it hot. But not now, I want to make you happy. I want to make you stay this time. In my ideal scenario, you’d never have to cry at all. I just said it because you kept looking at me like that, and I did it to make you stop. What matters is that you stop.”

Jimin starts to hyperventilate, crying so hard he nearly tips over. The downward spiral is sharp and unforgiving. There’s so much he wants to say, so much he needs to.

Jimin fists his fingers into Taehyung’s shirt, shaking. It feels like the floodgates have finally opened. All the things he’s wanted to say to Taehyung flow out at breakneck speed.

“Why did you do it?” Jimin asks, his throat heavy, voice broken. “Why do you keep doing this to me? Why did you break my heart?” He sobs.

Taehyung stares down at him, his eyes wide.

“All I did was love you,” Jimin accuses. “That’s all I did. All I did was want you. Why do you keep—why do you keep hurting me—”

Taehyung finally sits down onto the bed and gently takes hold of his face, wiping away his tears with his thumbs.

“Tell me why you did it,” Jimin demands, his voice shaking. “Tell me why I wasn’t enough for you. Tell me why I wasn’t good enough for you to love.”

“Jimin.”

“Just tell me. Why did you break me? Why?”

Taehyung leans in and kisses him. Jimin shudders against his lips, and he feels sparks fly behind his eyelids, dancing round his heart and lungs. He’s always felt them, little balls of light, whenever he’s with Taehyung. Even if he’s dead, they aren’t. They dance and swim like nothing happened at all.

“I’m sorry.”

Jimin’s heard it a million times before. He slams his fist against Taehyung’s chest, dissatisfied with the answer. He cries harder, his heart wrenching. Taehyung kisses him once more, and pulls Jimin into his lap. Jimin bawls into his neck, feeling like he’s 18 again.

He sits there for longer than he can keep track of, and Taehyung lets him. Taehyung babies Jimin, doing the usual of rubbing his back and stroking his hair. It works, and Jimin’s so drained that he falls asleep after a long while, too tired to keep his eyes open.

He wakes up hours later, and it’s nighttime now. Taehyung seemed to have moved him at a certain point, because the other man is shirtless and Jimin is draped over his chest, Taehyung’s arm curled around his waist.

Jimin stares up at Taehyung’s face, deeply asleep. He’s gorgeous. Always has been. Sharp features, long eyelashes, soft lips. Jimin should hurt him when he’s vulnerable like this, try to escape.

But he can’t bring himself to. He can’t hurt Taehyung.

Jimin cries silently for the rest of the night.

-

Jimin floats through the next few days.

He watches lots of TV. If he's good, which he has been for the past few days, he gets lots of gifts. Taehyung treats him well. He buys Jimin all of his favourite food. Yesterday, he even bought Jimin a gaming console. No online connectivity of course. It's full of retro games. He pampers him, strokes his hair, gives him massages. They always bathe together too. There's something about bare skin to skin contact under water that's so intimate yet it makes his stomach crawl.

Jimin had asked for a crochet kit, but Taehyung said no. No sharp objects, even if crochet needles are typically blunt.

Taehyung's out of the house for long stretches of time. But Jimin knows that he just comes straight home after he's done studying and practising. He isn't cheating on Jimin. At least not anymore. And even the word *cheating* is a stretch, considering the fact that they aren't exactly together. But Jimin's too afraid to even think the sentiment let alone say it, lest Taehyung reads his thoughts and loses his temper.

The peace they have is a safe haven. But it's also a glass house that can be easily shattered.

If there's one thing Jimin is thankful for, it's that Taehyung hasn't forced himself upon him. He hasn't made any sexual advances towards him, which unnerves Jimin yet relieves him all at once. It's out of character for Taehyung and confuses him, but Jimin also isn't ready in the slightest. He's too scared.

Taehyung is also very careful about the things he says to Jimin. Especially after the last time. It seems, at face value, that he's genuinely committed to fixing things between them. He walks on eggshells as much as Jimin does. Of course, when he's angry, scathing words slip

out. But Jimin is being extremely careful not to trigger any sort of negative response. He's being good, and his cooperation seems to be reaping its rewards. Peaceful cohabitation is where they're at right now. They wake up and they sleep together, they eat together and they spend time together. Not much conversation in between it all, or at least from Jimin. Taehyung's chatter does fill the time.

Jimin wonders if this is his life now. Just sitting at home, his hours pointing to when Taehyung returns. It's weird, and confusing. All the new stimuli and experiences seem like they're coaxing Jimin to forget everything that happened and move forward. To just settle in and let life pass by. He thinks about everything he imagined for himself, a thriving career, getting married, lots of fun and happy experiences. He thinks about Jungkook, although he's very careful that he doesn't around Taehyung. It's like a part of him is genuinely afraid that Taehyung can hear his thoughts.

Jimin, despite it all being laid out in front of him, is terribly confused. He has been for a long time.

Taehyung had approached him back then all those years ago…and they started dating not long after. It wasn't a detached relationship. But the entire time, Taehyung cheated on him with countless people. Even put Jimin in the same boat as them. So okay, he lied to Jimin and strung him along. He doesn't care about him, never did.

But on the flip side, Taehyung isn't the way he is with Jimin with anyone else. This level of perversion, of derangement, seems to be reserved exclusively for him. He's obsessive and possessive. His deep rooted anger issues spring up as easily as breathing when it comes to him. Taehyung was always known to be a laid back person, and it was always Jimin who knew that it wasn't true. Taehyung wanted him enough to rehaul his whole life, move to a new house, buy and coordinate a million different things just to have him.

He just doesn't care if Jimin is okay with any of this. If he says no to anything, Taehyung will just force it. Jimin's own thoughts and feelings ultimately do not matter in the grand scheme of things. They have no impact on the outcome, Taehyung has made that very clear. He belongs to Taehyung, mind, body and soul.

It's strange, but it is obviously what Taehyung comprehends as love.

Jimin can't understand it. He doesn't think he ever will. But it all seems to make perfect sense in Taehyung's head, not a single thing out of place.

Jimin should be thankful that the days so far have been uneventful.

But, he fears that he's slowly starting to slip into this. The thoughts that poke at his brain from within, about mapping an escape route, analyzing the things around him to find anything to exploit are slowly starting to dwindle and become less frequent. He just focuses on the moment as he's living through it, his survival instinct evolving to something more passive. He just makes himself smaller as the days go by.

If he's good, he won't be hurt.

Jimin can see the cost of it. He shouldn't give up so easily, not when he's so sure Yoongi and Jungkook are out there searching for him. The lack of clues or direction they may have are entirely his fault; a product of his foolishness in believing everything Taehyung told him without question. In the pursuit of short term survival and peace of mind, he compromises his future. But he can feel his motivation for it growing bleaker as the days pass.

Jimin wonders why it is that they provoke such strong reactions in each other. Even when they were together, back when there was still some semblance of normality to their relationship, Jimin always felt this innate need to please Taehyung every way he could, as much as he could. If there was something Taehyung didn't like, he'd work swiftly to change it. It was more than just fear of his anger, rather a need to have his approval and feel worthy of his love. Jimin was addicted to it, and could never be tired of it.

Maybe what he's feeling right now is a sick extension of that part of his brain, coaxed out through the trauma of everything that's happening right now. A self-defence mechanism put into place by his mind to make sure it doesn't fall apart. Jimin knows that despite whatever feelings he has buried deep within him, he doesn't want to get back together with Taehyung. Not after everything. He was happy when they were apart, except for the odd moments he'd lay awake and cry when the weight grew too much to bear.

He owes it to Jungkook to keep trying. And he owes it to Yoongi, who has built him up from nothing. Yoongi and him, they'd do anything for each other. Jimin has to try for him. So he

can see him again, and hug him, and thank him for loving him despite it all. He just needs to do it, could care less about what happens to him afterward.

Jimin promises himself to keep trying. Even if his mind tells him to give up.

If he's good, he won't be hurt.

If he's good, he might finally experience what being loved by Taehyung feels like.

-

"Hey."

Jimin looks up, his eyes dazed.

Taehyung sets a sheet of paper and a pen down onto the table before him. Jimin's been sitting on the sofa for hours, barely realized the way time flew by. He notices that Taehyung is wearing surgical gloves.

"I need you to write down whatever I tell you. In calm, stable handwriting. You screw any of it up, you'll do it all over again. The sooner you do it properly, the better. Okay?"

Jimin nods.

"Sit up."

Jimin listens, settling by the edge of the sofa. He picks up the pen.

“Write down whatever I say out loud. Don’t try to sneak anything in there. Got it?”

Jimin nods once more.

“Hello.”

Jimin writes it down.

“My name is Park Jimin, and I’ve been registered as missing by my brother Min Yoongi.”

Jimin freezes up, the blood in his veins turning to ice. The corners of Taehyung’s mouth curve up a little, eyes glinting with something terrifying. He rounds the coffee table, looming over Jimin’s back so he can see what he’s writing, resting a heavy and nauseating hand on his shoulder.

“Keep writing,” he commands in a low voice. Jimin obeys, writing whatever he said down, his fingers now starting to tremble. He has an inkling of where this is going, and he’s already dreading it.

“I’m writing this letter to let you know that I have not been kidnapped. I have made the conscious decision to abandon my life. I was overwhelmed with university work and I felt suffocated by my brother and Jeon Jungkook. Spending time around them has been affecting my mental health. I needed to escape them and I am happy now. Please do not come looking for me, and please respect my decision. I am alive and well. Do not look for me, that is my only request.” Taehyung recites, calm and stable.

Jimin hasn’t written any of it down. His eyes sting with tears, fingers white where they grip the pen. Even the pen is a soft tip one, incapable of any damage.

“What are you waiting for? Go on. Do you need me to repeat it?”

“T-Tae…” Jimin whimpers. “Please d-don’t-”

“Don’t what?” Taehyung asks. When Jimin doesn’t respond, he slams his hand down onto the table, startling Jimin. “Don’t fucking what?”

Tears stream down Jimin’s cheeks, and a few of them land on the paper.

“Fuck,” Taehyung snaps, grabbing the sheet and shoving it into Jimin’s face. “It’s got your fucking tears all over it. You think they won’t analyze this for DNA and see that you were sobbing like a stupid baby?” He crumples it then, tossing it onto the floor. It’s replaced by a fresh sheet.

“Start again.”

“Tae, I d-don’t want to hurt my hyung. I can’t tell him he s-suffocated me, please don’t make me-”

“Do it, or I’m gonna make sure you’re not gonna have any fingers left to write with. Don’t make me fucking hurt you to get you to do what I say every time. I need you to be calm and in working condition to write this. Are you telling me you aren’t happy to be here? I dare you to say it. Say it right now, to my face. Say you aren’t happy to be here.”

Jimin’s tongue feels useless, unable to put together any words. He continues to cry, his fingers shaking. He can’t. He can’t say it. It would be like walking into his own death. Once again, he feels like his hands are tied.

“That’s what I thought. Start writing.”

Jimin does, but Taehyung snatches and rips apart the paper when his handwriting is too shaky.

It just goes on and on, until he's finally managed to write the whole letter as Taehyung wants it hours later. At this point, Jimin is just relieved it's over and that he's completed what Taehyung's asked of him. He doesn't have the mental strength to think about the repercussions, because his failure to cooperate would've meant something worse.

He hopes Yoongi will never believe this. His heart threatens to break at the thought of either Yoongi or Jungkook taking this as the truth.

I'm sorry, he says in his mind. Taehyung makes him press his fingers all over the paper, fold and sign it himself. He makes him put it in the envelope too, and makes him write the address it's meant to be delivered to on the front. It's a police station.

Taehyung takes it from him then, handling it with his gloved hands.

That's the last Jimin sees of the letter, and the last he has the energy to think of it either.

-

Whenever Taehyung comes home from class or practice, he always makes himself a protein shake.

Jimin's near memorized the routine now. He knows which cabinet the protein powder is kept in, and the fact that Taehyung adds two bananas and milk and some peanut butter. He knows where it's all kept.

One day, he speaks when Taehyung's in the middle of sipping this daily drink. The other man had taken his shirt off as soon as he'd gotten home, so he's bare-chested with his grey sweats hanging low on his hips. Jimin pointedly does not look at his abs and happy trail.

"Does it taste good?" Jimin asks.

Taehyung looks up, smiling at him lightly as their eyes meet.

“What does? My protein shake?”

Jimin nods, shifting on his feet. His bony ankles glide against each other. He’s definitely lost a bunch of weight.

“It’s alright, does the job. Wanna try?”

Jimin nods once more. He slowly and softly patters his way to where Taehyung stands, something in mind glazing over when Taehyung gently takes hold of the side of his face and brings the glass to his lips.

Jimin takes a tiny sip. It tastes a little chalky despite the addition of bananas, but Jimin pretends that it tastes amazing. He hums slightly.

“Nice?” Taehyung asks.

“ ‘s yummy.”

Taehyung grins, the kind that makes his eyes curve up. Jimin’s heart skips a beat. Taehyung’s thumb glides over his bottom lip to catch some of the drink that stuck to the side of his mouth, and leans in to kiss him right after.

When he pulls away, Jimin speaks.

“Can you teach me how to make it?” He asks. “I don’t like eating in the mornings so I can make it my breakfast.”

He tries to keep his face blank, casual. But inside, his heart is hammering in his chest.

Taehyung seems to scrutinize him, face void of any emotion. It betrays nothing which is terrifying in itself, but Jimin tries his hardest to hold onto his already crumbling resolve.

“Why?” Taehyung eventually asks, slowly.

“B-Because I’m bored, sitting here all day,” Jimin answers. “Especially when you aren’t around. If I have something new to do…it would be nice.”

Taehyung hums, seeming to mull it over.

“If you’re worried about the blades in the blender, I can promise not to detach them,” Jimin adds.

“You would?”

“Yes. I p-promise. I won’t do anything bad.”

“Good. Because if you do, you know what’ll happen, right?”

Jimin stares up at him. The corner of Taehyung’s mouth quirks up slightly before he continues speaking.

“If I find out you’re lying, you know what’s coming. And if you do anything to try and leave, I’d put your pictures all over the internet. I’d print them out and make sure they’re distributed like the flyers of a new restaurant. I will do it, don’t think I won’t.”

The cold chill he feels makes him want to cower and give up immediately. He'd rather die than let that happen. But still, he powers through.

"Yes, I know. I promise."

Taehyung nods. "Alright then."

He then shows Jimin how to make the milkshake, like Jimin hasn't been watching him do it a million times already. He shows him how to split the bananas and where the protein powder is, and the milk in the fridge. Taehyung shows him how to operate the blender. Jimin asks Taehyung for chocolate powder and dates so he can make it even tastier.

After that, Jimin gives it a rest. He's done enough for today.

They spend the rest of the night the way they usually do, Jimin lying in Taehyung's lap as they watch movies or play video games. Taehyung orders them dinner that night, some black bean noodles. Jimin doesn't have much of an appetite, so Taehyung ends up having most of his bowl too.

Nothing seems out of the ordinary, so Jimin tries to make himself relax. Taehyung isn't unaccustomed to long stretches of silence from him, so Jimin at the very least has the bracket of space to sort through his thoughts.

Jimin has…a plan.

One that could work, if it's executed properly. And if he manages to stay under Taehyung's radar. He's not going to do anything unless he's thought of, considered and factored in any and every eventuality. He's still traumatized by the attempt with the note.

He's going to have to do it all slowly. Bit by bit.

-

Jimin makes himself the protein shake every morning. Just without the protein powder, because he doesn't like the flavour of it. Taehyung, ever since discovering Jimin took a liking to preparing the drinks, has stocked their kitchen with all sorts of ingredients to make Jimin happy. An array of seasonal fruits, different types of chocolates and syrups, nuts and more.

Despite it initially just being an excuse for a grander purpose, it does act as some form of therapy to Jimin. Having something to do, enjoying a sweet drink that he's made himself. Some semblance of control.

Taehyung was wary the first time, but he's slowly started to let his guard down the more he grows accustomed to the idea that Jimin isn't up to trouble.

One day, Jimin has Taehyung's protein shake ready for him by the time he gets home.

Taehyung did seem genuinely surprised, and was suspicious. Jimin took a sip of it to assuage any concerns and it was only then that Taehyung drank it.

Jimin kept this up for a few more days. It seemed that Taehyung liked having that little responsibility off his shoulders, and appeared thrilled that Jimin was doting on him. The good little housewife he wanted. Jimin, knowing that Taehyung had an immense sweet tooth, started making the other man's drinks more and more complex and delicious.

Soon, Taehyung would wolf down the shake Jimin made for him without so much as a second thought. He'd drink it right out of the blender jar. It's a bitter form of nostalgia and relief that plagues Jimin once he realizes that he's now entered the next phase of his plan. He'd grown so used to making Jungkook's protein shakes that this felt as easy as breathing. A warped reminder of something he used to do so happily before, an act of love. The reminder of Jungkook is a motivator to push on.

On a Friday night, Jimin decides to act.

He doesn’t do much on Fridays, Taehyung. He just comes home and spends the evenings here with Jimin. Tomorrow is Saturday, and Taehyung has nowhere to be. He’ll have a relaxed schedule, and will likely sleep in.

So there’s a whole, big bracket of time.

Jimin starts the day normally. He wakes up to the feeling he usually does; the sensation of Taehyung rubbing his stubble against Jimin’s cheeks and neck along with a few kisses. Jimin’s long since stopped complaining, so he lays in bed through it all and also as Taehyung gets up to brush his teeth, shower and shave.

Jimin didn’t sleep much the previous night, anticipation and nerves nearly doing him in.

They eat some scrambled eggs together for breakfast (made by Taehyung as Jimin isn’t allowed to handle the stove or any cooking equipment) and then Taehyung leaves, already dressed in his scrubs.

“I’ll be home by 6:30 pm,” Taehyung tells him when he’s at the foyer, pulling on his shoes. He’s always looked handsome in his scrubs. “I have a half day at class and then I’m going to a nearby province for a swim meet. That’s why I’ll be a little late. I’ll bring back something nice for dinner too.”

Jimin nods, and Taehyung’s eyes soften. He momentarily leaves the foyer and walks back into the house even though his shoes are on, and drops a sweet kiss to Jimin’s lips before he leaves.

And then, Jimin’s left alone.

The moment Taehyung leaves, Jimin waits an hour. Just in case the other man has forgotten something, or plans to return. During this time, he makes himself his shake, worrying his bottom lip bloody as he does.

Once the hour is up, Jimin carefully approaches the kitchen, lowering to a tepid squat in front of the cabinet under the sink. The one he's been eyeing for a while now, and has peeked into.

He opens it and takes out the first aid box within. The same one Taehyung had used the other day to patch him up after the burns. The collar's been disinfected and is back around his neck now, but is the least of Jimin's concerns.

It was a mistake on Taehyung's part to show him the first aid kit, and to open it in front of him.

Jimin undoes the plastic clasps one either side of the sizable plastic box with shaky fingers, and opens it to come face to face with the same supplies he'd seen the other day. Gauze, iodine, cotton, disinfectant, various ointments, bandaids.

Jimin then looks at essential medication. Mostly painkillers, antacids, some routine antibiotics. Things every budding doctor knows they should keep at home, in the event of a minor medical emergency.

And a full bottle of sleeping pills.

Jimin picks it up, trembling. He shakes it with a near limp wrist, startling himself as the pills within clatter loudly against the inside of the bottle. There are so many inside. Jimin opens it to look too.

Taehyung often has trouble sleeping. He did even back when they were dating, long chronic spells of insomnia weighing him down for months before it got better. It seemed cyclical. Those were the periods of time he'd be more wound up as well, on the verge of snapping at every little thing.

Jimin stares at the bottle, turning it around to look at the ingredients and directions of use. There are plenty of words that jumble in his head to the point that he can't make sense of them, and he stops trying after a little while.

Jimin sets it aside and repacks the first aid kit, closing it and putting it back inside.

His heart is hammering in his chest.

The day passes in a blur after that.

Jimin just stares at the bottle of pills he can see on the kitchen counter from where he sits curled up on the living room sofa. He can't focus on anything on the TV. He tries to nap, but it doesn't work because anticipation and dread keep him awake in equal turn.

When it's 5:30, one hour before Taehyung said he'd come home, Jimin springs into action.

He runs into the kitchen on legs he can't feel, and hurriedly begins to put together the ingredients he needs for Taehyung's daily protein shake. He yanks open the blender lid, nearly squashes the bananas as he tries to split them so it fits inside, dunks the scoop of protein powder and drops a little too.

And when everything's in, Jimin's eyes fall to the bottle of pills.

He washes his hands, dries them by wiping them on his own t-shirt, and opens it.

Jimin promptly realizes that he has no idea how many to put in. He's never been reliant on sleeping medication; neither has anyone he's ever been close to. Yoongi and Jungkook are both healthy sleepers.

Jimin tips the bottle slightly and finds himself holding a handful of pills.

"No…" he says, so quietly he can barely hear himself. If he puts too many in, he'll kill Taehyung. Just the thought of Taehyung dying makes his heart wrench and tears involuntarily spring to his eyes. He can't bear the thought of it despite everything that's happened. Jimin can't kill him, he can't hurt him. He'll never be able to live with himself.

His head hurts and he feels faint. He stares at the tablets in his hand, zoning out as he tries to decide the correct amount.

Jimin's tummy starts to twist and turn and his mind betrays him. He starts to feel like he can hear footsteps approaching the front door, thunderingly loud in his ears where they're actually muffled.

Jimin acts impulsively.

He dunks a fraction of the handful of pills into the blender and rushes to turn it on, haphazardly also hurrying to return the leftover pills to the bottle, then moving to put it back in the first aid kit. He can hear the sharp blades of the blender mix everything together. By the time he's standing back up, the milkshake is ready. It looks like it always does, smelling like bananas with its wheatish colour tone.

And like clockwork, barely 30 seconds later, Jimin hears the front door beep as it's unlocked.

His heartbeat's in his ears. He's sweating. He took an hour to make this milkshake. It didn't feel like that long. How much time did he spend staring at the pills? Taehyung's going to find out. He's going to find out and he's going to kill Jimin.

Taehyung walks in once he gets the door open, and Jimin turns around to look at him. He immediately feels nauseous.

"Hi, baby," Taehyung greets, smiling at him.

There's a terrible feeling descending over Jimin. His knuckles are white where they grip the edges of the kitchen counter he's leaning against. He should play it cool but he can't. He can't shake the very real fear that the other man will find out.

Taehyung grins at him. He looks freshly showered, and he's holding a bag of delicious smelling food. Jimin's eyes fall to a glimmering gold medal slung around his neck.

"Jimin?" Taehyung prods, the smile slipping off his face, concerned at the lack of response. "Why do you look so pale?"

"I'm n-not feeling well…" Jimin responds, because it's true. Taehyung is quick to dump his bags onto the nearby table and floor before he stalks his way to Jimin.

"What's wrong? Tell me," Taehyung demands, seeming panicked. He brings a hand up to Jimin's forehead, then slipping downward to rest against his neck. Taehyung's thumb digs into the flesh, feeling his pulse.

Jimin realizes that it's a stupid excuse. Taehyung is studying to be a doctor, of course he'd press. It'd be terribly easy for him to pick out any lies and inconsistencies too.

"You seem weak," Taehyung deduces after a few seconds of focused silence. He then pulls away, walking to the fridge and opening it before he looks inside. He sighs then, a smooth outward exhale of breath.

"You haven't eaten anything today," Taehyung says. "Your lunch is still here in the fridge. You barely touched your breakfast either."

"O-Oh."

"Why didn't you eat?" Taehyung asks, looking up at him as he curls up an inquisitive eyebrow.

Jimin's saliva tastes rancid in his mouth. He's scared that Taehyung will know he's lying. He can't say he forgot to eat. There's no way he forgot to do anything out of his microscopic list of daily activities.

“I wasn’t hungry. My tummy hurt.”

“That could be because we ate spicy food last night,” Taehyung answers, moving his hand downward to rub Jimin’s tummy comfortingly. “Let me give you some meds.”

Jimin panics when he realizes that Taehyung is bending to retrieve the first aid box. He grips Taehyung’s shoulders, trying to tug him back upright. His little fingers look pathetic against Taehyung’s wide frame.

“N-No,” Jimin protests. “I don’t want to take medicine.”

Taehyung frowns, but complies.

“Why not? It’ll help you.”

“I just don’t want to. I u-used to be like this back then too, remember? I never took meds even when my head would hurt when I studied for too long.”

Taehyung considers this, humming. It is true. Jimin hardly ever resorts to medication if at all, never has. He’d had to take plenty of pills and icky syrups when he was younger, back when he’d fall ill at the drop of a hat. He’s sick of them now and has been for a long time.

“Okay. You should probably eat now then,” Taehyung concedes. “Go set the table.”

Jimin scurries to obey, before he’s halted by Taehyung’s hand on his shoulder.

“Forgetting something?”

Jimin freezes before he realizes what Taehyung is talking about. He leans up and kisses him gently, lips meeting his for a fleeting second. Taehyung chases it once he pulls away.

“Welcome home,” Jimin greets, casting his eyes downward. Taehyung looks down at him fondly, twirling a strand of Jimin’s hair in between his fingers.

Jimin’s fingers fiddle and fidget with the gold medal dangling from Taehyung’s neck.

“I won it today,” Taehyung offers. “Beat my own personal record.”

“Congratulations,” Jimin says timidly.

“It’s all because of you,” Taehyung responds then, stepping closer and wrapping his arms around him. He pulls him into a warm hug. “You’ve changed my life like you always do. I wish you could’ve watched me. Maybe next time I’ll get someone to record it so I can show it to you when I get home. Does that sound nice?”

Jimin nods.

“Okay. Go set the table.”

Jimin once again scurries to obey. He’s quick to take out their plates and chopsticks, and hurries to open up the boxes of takeout. He also realizes that there are two massive boxes of the same type of noodles.

“Tae, do you want to open just one for now and see if we can finish it? I-” Jimin turns around.

Taehyung’s in the kitchen, and he’s holding up the blender jar and downing the protein shake. Jimin can see his Adam's apple bob as he drinks it, and he suddenly feels ashen. The terrible

feeling returns, which he quickly identifies as guilt. It's thick, heavy guilt. For cheating Taehyung.

Jimin's brain screams at him to stop Taehyung, run over there and snatch the jar away and pour it all down the sink. His head spins.

But sooner than he can realize it, Taehyung has drunk it all. Jimin stares at his back in horror, tears springing to his eyes. He's quick to wipe them away furiously. The guilt threatens to consume him.

Jimin turns around and rests his hands on the dining table, squeezing his eyes shut. He wills himself to calm down. It's too late now. He just has to work quickly, and go with the flow.

He seizes up when he hears Taehyung approach, stiffening as he feels a hand stroke his flank along with a kiss on the juncture of his neck and shoulder.

"Let's eat."

They sit down then, and they do eat. Taehyung has a monstrous appetite as he usually does after matches, similar to Jungkook. Jimin forces down as many mouthfuls as he can since he'd said he hadn't eaten the whole day. He struggles to keep it down though, and is mostly silent as Taehyung rambles about his win and what his day was like.

It's when he's done eating that the yawning starts.

Taehyung blinks it away, frowning.

"What time is it?" He asks.

Jimin looks up at the clock on the wall.

“It’s 8:04 pm.”

Taehyung’s frown deepens. “Why am I so tired?...”

Jimin doesn’t respond, focusing on his fingers where they have a death grip on his chopsticks.

Taehyung rubs his eyes. “Fuck, why do I feel all bleary?

Jimin wants to throw up. He wants to confess to what he’s done. He wants to curl up into a ball and die.

“Why aren’t you saying anything?” Taehyung questions. “My vision’s spinning. What the fuck. I’m so tired...”

“You didn’t sleep much last night,” Jimin finally responds, although the lie sits heavy on his tongue. He’s on the verge of panicked tears. “You must be exhausted after class and your match. And you just a-ate a heavy meal.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Taehyung responds, standing up. “I didn’t even get to nap on the way to and from the swim meet. Those fuckers kept fucking screaming and cheering…and the match was a super intense sprint too…I really pushed myself.”

“Go r-rest now. I’ll clear up,” Jimin insists, and Taehyung’s too out of it to pick up on how shaky his voice is. Taehyung nods, and he stumbles his way to Jimin to place a sloppy kiss on his lips before he makes his way to their bedroom.

“I want you in bed with me as soon as you’re done cleaning up,” he says on his way inside. “I’ll know if you aren’t there. Don’t keep me waiting.”

Jimin doesn't follow, nor does he look. He's already crying with distress. He pointedly keeps his eyes away from the bedroom as he clears up the plates and wipes down the table. Even as he puts the blender jar in the dishwasher.

And then, finally, when there's nothing else to do, he goes to their bedroom.

Taehyung's on his back on their bed, and he's snoring lightly. He's strewn over it, like he'd fallen asleep the moment he lay down.

Jimin nudges him. Nothing.

He claps then. He shouts. He screams. He tries to shake Taehyung awake.

Nothing. Taehyung just keeps sleeping. His breathing levels seem normal.

And then Jimin, springs into action.

He doesn't let himself stop and panic. He doesn't let himself do anything but go through whatever he's rehearsed in his mind a million times now.

Jimin runs into the dining room, and grabs Taehyung's phone which the other man left on the table. He takes it and returns to the bedroom, sitting down on the bed next to Taehyung. He's scared that Taehyung might wake up at any moment, and rushes.

Jimin grabs his large, heavy hand and tries to unlock his phone through the fingerprint sensor. His right thumb doesn't work. His left thumb does.

The moment the phone unlocks, Jimin can feel the blood rushing through his ears. He has to stay here. If Taehyung woke up and saw that Jimin wasn't in the room with him , he'd be furious. When they head to bed, Jimin is only allowed to leave when he needs to use the washroom.

Jimin turns around and sits on his side of the bed, hunched over the edge. So if Taehyung wakes up, he won't see Jimin with the phone immediately.

The first thing he does is click open the image gallery. He scrolls back in the main album to when the video would've been taken, and finds nothing. Not a single image of him. Like he never existed in Taehyung's life. There's nothing in the screenshots folder either.

Jimin doesn't let himself freak out, moving on autopilot. It seems that the panicked side of his brain has submitted to the more desperate one.

He clicks back to the main gallery and keeps scrolling, till he comes across an album called *Mine*.

Jimin just knows. He already knows it's this one.

When he tries to click on it, he sees that it's locked. Jimin tries to use Taehyung's thumbprint again, winded by how hard it is to lift Taehyung's hand. His limbs are heavy, especially now that he's asleep. Even though he manages to lift his hand once more, the thumbprint doesn't work.

It requires a 4 digit code.

Jimin tries Taehyung's birthday. He tries his own birthday. Neither work.

Then, he tries their anniversary.

The folder opens. Jimin's surprised, distantly. He didn't even think Taehyung remembered their anniversary. He's dismayed that he remembers it himself.

Inside is just one file.

Jimin puts the volume on mute and plays it. Immediately, he knows it's the video he's looking for. He doesn't bother to watch it, simply scrubbing through it and pushing through the nausea till he confirms it's what he thinks it is.. Jimin hits delete, and sighs with relief when an option pops up to delete the version of it in the cloud as well, as it seems that Taehyung has optimized his phone storage.

It takes a few seconds, but the video is gone.

Jimin then heads to the file recovery folder where he permanently deletes the video for good.

Once it's done, Jimin sobs with relief. He feels elated, like the biggest burden is lifted off his shoulders. He wipes away a few happy tears. He finally feels alive, can't believe he pulled this off.

Jimin takes a few seconds to breathe before he opens up the calling application with numb fingers.

He starts to input Yoongi's phone number, because hearing his hyung's voice is what he needs right now. He's always known it by heart, ever since they received their first phones when they were younger. Yoongi never changed his number. Yoongi knows Taehyung. Jimin will just tell him to find out where he is and get the police.

Jimin's about to hit dial when he feels a hand knot into his hair and yank his head back harshly, a surge of pain shooting up his spine. Jimin flails backward, screaming. His eyes meet Taehyung's bloodshot and furious ones.

Taehyung doesn't say anything. Jimin's already crying, the hysteria coating his mind like napalm. He squeezes his eyes shut, whimpering as he feels Taehyung yank the phone out of his hands.

It’s silent for a few seconds. Jimin just cries, the impending doom threatening to kill him. He’s going to die. This is where he dies. Taehyung’s going to kill him.

“What did you put in my drink?” Is the first thing Taehyung says. His voice is calm, stable.

Jimin shakes his head, eyes still pressed shut, tears leaking out the edges.

“What. The. Fuck. Did. You. Put. In. My. Drink,” Taehyung repeats, yanking at his hair harder and harder in between each word. “You stupid bitch.”

When Jimin doesn’t respond, Taehyung stands up and yanks him off the bed in one harsh tug with the hand in his hair. Jimin crashes to the ground, wailing as Taehyung drags him through the house. It feels like his scalp is being ripped off him. He resigns himself to it, just crying as he’s hauled across the floor.

“T-Tae-”

Taehyung throws him to the ground once they reach the kitchen, right in front of the cabinet under the sink.

“I already know what it is, but I want you to show me.”

Jimin tries to sit up and look at him before he opens his mouth. Taehyung beats him to it.

“Another word out of you, and I’ll make sure you’re unrecognizable. You’ll wish you were dead. Just do it.”

Jimin’s shaking. He’s shaking so hard he can see it let alone feel it. His teeth chatter. He knows his face is a red mess. He’s so terrified but he knows there’s no way out of this.

He opens the door to the cabinet and takes out the first aid box, trembling.

“Show me exactly what you used”

Taehyung still sounds a little slurred. Jimin opens the box with fingers that don’t seem to cooperate, and he takes out the bottle of sleeping pills. The tablets inside rattle loudly with how hard he’s shaking, hands trembling violently. Taehyung hums, taking it from him. Jimin jerks and flinches as their fingers make contact.

“Hmmm. How many did you give me, Jiminie?”

Jimin shakes his head, his chest heaving as he sobs. He can’t breathe.

“Aw. Crying now, huh? Okay, I’ll let you talk. How many did you put in my fucking drink?”

“I d-don’ know, I promise-”

Taehyung punches him across the face, right in the eye, sending his head swinging to the side. The shockwaves of it wrack through his skull and his head spins.

“That’s for being a dumb fucking cunt.”

The taste of iron spreads over his tongue he accidentally bit, putrid. His ears start to ring. He doesn’t think he can take much more of this. Taehyung scrutinizes the bottle of pills, reading the tiny print of the label.

“There are 100 tablets in this bottle. This one is unopened, so whatever’s missing is whatever you put in my drink. I haven’t been taking these ever since I got you back,” Taehyung says. “Count them.”

Taehyung opens the bottle and dunks the pills over Jimin's head. They clatter to the floor around him like pearls.

"Count. Out loud."

Jimin starts counting, leaning over the floor and gathering all the pills to one bunch. He's shaking, so it's harder. He can't see so well out of his left eye. His mind is growing foggy, and he can't think straight with the pain.

"One…….two….th-three-"

Taehyung kicks him in the stomach, knocking the breath out of his lungs. Jimin curls up on the floor, gasping.

"Faster. I know it might be too much for your tiny brain, but the more time you take, the worse it's gonna be."

Jimin shakily sits back up, clutching his abdomen with a trembling hand and jerking once he feels the pain. He's seeing doubles, vision spinning. He can't. He's too weak to survive this mentally…he can't.

Jimin just keeps counting. Counting faster. He counts all the pills as Taehyung stands over him, watching. Jimin flinches everytime he moves. It feels like it's going on forever. Just counting and counting and counting…his mind is falling apart…

"Eighty seven….ei-eighty eight…eighty nine."

There are eighty nine pills still left in the bottle.

Taehyung laughs. Jimin feels smaller than he's ever felt. He feels like he's dissociating. He's not here anymore. None of this is real. It's not real.

“Eleven pills, huh?” Taehyung asks. “It would take at least thirty to actually hurt me or knock me out. But you wouldn’t know that, because you’re a stupid fucking idiot who just wanted to ruin everything. Who just wants to break my heart, over and over.”

“I d-didn’t want to hurt you-”

“After everything I’ve done…how much I’ve loved you. You do this to me, you drug me, you sneak into my phone and try to call someone else. I woke up a little while ago and I was watching you.”

“I’m sorry! I p-promise, I w-won’t do it again, I won’t-”

“You know I’m studying to be a neurosurgeon, right? Just like my parents. I’ve learned about what parts of your brain control what actions. Maybe I should just split open your skull and mess around in there, huh? Sever everything that makes you keep being a little bitch. I’ll make you my puppet. Make you brain dead so you’ll stop fucking thinking. You’ll be a shell of a person.”

It terrifies Jimin. He’s too hysterical to realize that Taehyung is only in pre-med and definitely doesn’t have the skill set required yet to make good on his words. But that being said, there’s no guarantee that that would stop Taehyung from trying. Jimin’s so far gone that it feels too real, like something Taehyung would do right this moment.

“N-No! Please, no!” Jimin begs, clutching onto Taehyung’s leg.

“I was so happy when you started making my drinks,” Taehyung laughs, although his voice shakes. “I thought it meant that you loved me. That you wanted to do this for me…but you just wanted to kill me all along. You made me a fucking idiot. Just like you did the last time, you’re a no good rotten bitch-”

“T-Tae-”

“I can’t let you keep doing this to me.”

“Tae, no! Please-”

Taehyung kicks him, and Jimin’s back crashes into the cabinet behind him.

After that, he loses track of what happens. He just curls up on the floor and lets it happen, bursts of overwhelming pain across his body knocking the breath out of his lungs. He can feel the blood spurt out of his mouth with every impact and he goes deaf as his body breaks into little bits that can’t ever be put back together. He covers his ears and closes his eyes so it won’t be real. He can’t think anymore. Jimin can register every second of the pain, but he no longer has the will to do anything about it. It hurts. It hurts. He’s broken something.

Why won’t he just die?

Jimin doesn’t react when the blows stop. He doesn’t hear the sound of Taehyung’s heavy breathing, and the sounds of him walking away and then returning. He doesn’t say a word or make a single sound as Taehyung binds his arms and legs together with a rope, and then knots them together in the midpoint of his lower back.

Taehyung picks him up with a grip on the heavy knot, and carries him through the house. Jimin hangs limply, his blood dripping over the tiles. He can’t see them.

Taehyung peels back the expensive rug that’s in the centre of the living room. Beneath it is a trapdoor that Jimin wasn’t aware of the existence of, the kind that families back in the day would use for food storage.

Taehyung unlocks it, opens it, tosses him inside, and shuts it. Jimin’s enveloped by the darkness. He hears Taehyung lock it, and the dull thud of the rug being draped over it once more.

Jimin just lays there, his arms and legs bound. He coughs up a few mouthfuls of blood, slowly losing sensation in his limbs due to the way they're bound together tightly on his back. There's so much pain that he can't handle it. He just cries, a low, churned down agonizing weeping echoing in his ears. He barely realizes that it's coming out of his own mouth.

Jimin thinks about many things. He thinks about Yoongi, and what holding his hand feels like. About how his hyung would always make a big deal out of whatever minor injury he'd have, little nicks and scratches. He'd clean him up and put pretty bandages on the wound, coddle him and make him something nice which they would eat as they watch their favourite movie. He imagines feeling Yoongi's fingers stroking through his hair right now.

He thinks about Jungkook, and how much he loves him. The safety he feels when he's wrapped up in his arms, and his natural scent that puts Jimin at ease. The first person who taught Jimin what love really meant, was patient with him through it all. Jimin wants to see him again…

Jimin wonders if he'll ever see either of them again. His mind falls apart, right then and there.

He eventually falls unconscious.

And as he does, it's not Yoongi or Jungkook he sees.

It's Taehyung, staring down at him from a memory he has of many years ago. When he'd come to his house to talk to him for the first time. The first time he'd ever felt the warmth of his gaze on his body.

The residual butterflies in his tummy from that moment still linger.

-

When Jimin wakes up next, he doesn't know how long has passed.

He just hears the sound of the doors above him opening, and feels the blindingly painful sharp pressure on his limbs as he's lifted out of the dark space. He feels a knife slice through the ropes keeping him bound, and finds himself pressed into a warm, bare chest. He involuntarily leans into the body, desperate for comfort in his rife mind.

Jimin opens his eyes, and it feels difficult. It's too hard to adjust to the sudden burst of light after laying in darkness for so long. His left eye is swollen shut, telling of how many hours have passed.

As his vision adjusts, mostly only through his right eye, he comes face to face with Taehyung, who is crying.

Jimin's never seen him cry before. He can feel his chest shaking against his shoulder with his sobs. Taehyung's tears fall over his skin.

"I love you," he sobs, holding Jimin closer. "I'm so angry but I can't bear being without you."

Jimin's stunned. Taehyung tries to grip his face and make eye contact but Jimin's head lolls out of his hold, falling limp with the lack of strength.

"Why don't you love me?" Taehyung demands, shaking his shoulders. "Why do you keep breaking my heart over and over? What have you fucking done to me?"

Jimin stares up at him, dazed. His eyes keep unfocusing and crossing. He can hear every one of Taehyung's words crystal clear, but his mind is swimming. His heart wrenches.

"Y-You don't love me," he responds, his voice hoarse. He's barely audible, but it seems that his voice manages to reach Taehyung's ears.

“I do,” Taehyung responds, urged, pulling him closer. He grips Jimin’s jaw, keeping his head in place. “You don’t know what it’s like for me to have been without you. I was miserable…I love you. I’ve only ever loved you, I’ll only ever love you. I just want you,” Taehyung cries.

Jimin’s heart hammers in his chest. He’s never seen Taehyung like this before.

Now, he knows he isn’t lying.

“I want you so bad that I don’t care if you don’t want me. I want you to want me still. I’ll keep you here even if you never will. Jimin…I can’t be with anyone else. When we were apart, I know you think I didn’t care but I fell apart. I lost all my friends…I almost got kicked out of college because I couldn’t focus. I was removed as captain of the swim team because I kept fucking up. All I could think about was you. Why did you hurt me? I want you. I love you. I love you, I love you, I love you,”

Jimin finds himself crying too, once more. He can’t bear seeing Taehyung like this. He doesn’t know what’s happening to him. He feels sorry for him, and his first instinct is to comfort him. It’s like what happened hours ago didn’t ever happen. Like he imagined it.

Taehyung leans in to press his forehead to Jimin’s. Jimin lies limply over his lap. He can’t move even though he isn’t bound anymore, because everything hurts too much. He can’t feel any ability to move his body.

“I p-promise I love you. I won’t cheat on you again. I haven’t ever since I b-brought you home, because I love you. I don’t want anyone else. I realized my mistake…please, Jimin, please don’t give up on me…don’t give up on us. Don’t keep trying to leave me…all I want is you. I’ll be everything you want me to be, do whatever you want me to do…please. Please. I’ll try not to get so angry. Let’s go back to what we were…be mine.”

Taehyung loves him. He loves Jimin.

It fills a gaping hole in his chaos riddled heart. It’s everything Jimin wanted to hear a while ago. And now, it has its impact.

Jimin can't fight it any longer. He can't think about anything beyond what's right in front of him. Not when it's speaking directly to deep-seated trauma, and what has always felt like instinct. Too much has happened, his mind churned down. He feels weak, his thoughts all hanging on a single thread. Everything is too muddled.

He's always loved Taehyung.

Jimin leans up, and presses his lips to Taehyung's. He can't think anymore.

Taehyung stiffens at first, but returns the kiss, using his hand to cradle the side of Jimin's face. They stay there for a while, and Jimin just lets his mind take a backseat. He isn't active, just lets Taehyung kiss him, keeps his lips still and pliant for him to do whatever he wants.

Because in this moment, Jimin wants it. He's snapped. He's broken, mentally.

"Do you want me?" Taehyung asks. "Will you finally accept me again?"

Jimin blinks, his face still blank.

It's when Taehyung picks him up and stands that a cry of pain leaves Jimin's lips, as his bruises and the wounds on his body receive direct pressure. It hurts so much that it punches the breath out of his lungs, and he begins to cry once more.

"Shhh," Taehyung coaxes. "I'm sorry. I'll fix you soon, never wanted to hurt you. I'm sorry."

Jimin weakly wraps his trembling arms around Taehyung's shoulders.

"I love you," Taehyung says, kissing him as he walks them to the bedroom. Jimin gasps, his heart swelling as he hears it. The words aren't poisoned anymore.

Taehyung sets him down onto the bed, gently, before their lips meet once more. They stay like that, Taehyung wrapping his arms around him, trading soft kisses. Jimin's mind unravels like a spool of long, silky soft threadbare yarn.

Taehyung eventually pulls away, staring down at Jimin's dazed, glassed over eyes. Neither of them comment on the fact that he's trembling, has been ever since Taehyung took him out of the trapdoor.

"You should sleep."

Jimin leans up and presses his lips to Taehyung's once more, not wanting to be apart. He can't be alone again, not like he was down there. The skin to skin contact helps, because it distracts from the pain in his body. Taehyung pulls back once more and Jimin whimpers, tears welling up in his eyes.

"You need to rest-" Taehyung says against his lips, but he makes no effort to stop. Jimin brings his shaky arms up to pull him closer, thin pale limbs bruised purple contrasting with Taehyung's tan skin.

Soon, Taehyung stops protesting, leaning over Jimin and taking the lead.

He runs his hands up and underneath Jimin's loose t-shirt, eventually pulling it off him. It's not rushed, rather dizzyingly intimate. Jimin feels like he's floating. Taehyung is taking his time with him, something he never has before. Jimin wants to be close to him.

Jimin lays back and lets him. He whimpers in pain when Taehyung lifts up his hips to slide his shorts off, but sighs with relief when Taehyung tucks a pillow below his lower back to help support his weight.

And then, Jimin is bare. His body is bruised and streaked with blood where his skin has split, but he's otherwise the same.

Taehyung stares at him. Longer than should be considered normal, his eyes dark and wide and trailing over every inch of him. Jimin wants to feel sick. He should feel sick. But right now, all his emotions give way to something else he's always felt but never had the courage to voice.

"Do you hate my body?" Jimin asks, a few more tears leaking out the edges of his eyes.

Taehyung's head snaps up and Jimin jerks, startled.

"No," Taehyung responds immediately. "I love your body. I always have."

"Y-You're lying," Jimin sobs. "I'm not like all your girls. I have different parts." He knows he's not making sense. He feels stupid and small.

"I know, I love everything about you."

"N-No," Jimin says. "You never touch me there. You always f-flinched away. Am I ugly there?"

"No," Taehyung responds immediately. "You're beautiful. Everything about you is. Why didn't you tell me you felt this way before?"

" 'cause I didn't want to pressure you if you didn't like me. I just wanted you."

Taehyung presses a kiss to his lips, and then begins to press more gentle kisses down the length of his body. Jimin shivers, eyes fluttering shut. Taehyung kisses over his neck, his clavicles, his chest, his ribs, his belly button and his sharp hip bones.

Jimin jerks as he feels Taehyung's large hand curve around his small cock, as the other man continues to kiss down his inner thighs.

"Spread your legs, baby."

Jimin does, and the moment he lifts his left foot and presses it down onto the bed for purchase, he cries out in agony. His leg trembles.

Taehyung takes hold of his ankle, and Jimin feels another white hot wave of pain wash over him as the other man applies pressure.

"It's broken. I'll fix you up tomorrow."

Taehyung props him up so there's no pressure on his ankle, and spreads his other leg wider. The pain slowly starts to die down and devolve to numbness, and Jimin shivers as he feels Taehyung press a small kiss to the head of his cock.

He covers his eyes, leaning back.

"Everything about you is beautiful," Taehyung responds. "It was hard for me back then because I couldn't come to terms with my sexuality. Whether it meant that I liked guys. Now, I've realized that it doesn't matter. Because I only like you. That's all I know. You've always been beautiful, every inch of you. From the top of your head right down to your toes. You're so beautiful that you drive me crazy."

Taehyung kisses down the length too, small little pecks, and Jimin shudders when he feels a finger ghost over his hole.

"You're the most beautiful person I've ever seen. You were made from my brightest dreams, just for me."

Jimin's body is broken, in more ways than one. He finds himself responding to Taehyung's presence, voice, words and actions. He can feel the cloying sensation of arousal coat his senses, perhaps in submission because it feels right in the moment. His body is hardwired to respond to Taehyung, to always be highly reactive to him. It's like it's seared into his DNA, coded into his genetics as an infallible response.

Taehyung leaves momentarily, and Jimin closes his eyes, suddenly tired.

What he feels next is more kisses on his inner thigh, and a slick finger prodding at his rim. Jimin gasps, his back arching even though it hurts a million and more muscles in his body. Taehyung continues to drop more kisses up and down the length of his cock, before he presses another one to his rim.

Jimin's breathing is choppy. He's got his head turned to the side, chest rising and falling. His skin feels tingly and his damaged stomach wrings. The oxygen rushes out of his lungs in one smooth exhale as he feels Taehyung slide a finger inside of him.

"I'll go slow," Taehyung says. He takes his time to prep Jimin, using plenty of lube, sliding his fingers in slowly yet deep, never hard. Jimin feels like he's floating, mind drifting away further as he feels himself stretching wider and wider, opening up on Taehyung's long fingers. It feels so good he could die.

Taehyung fingers him patiently, leaning up to kiss Jimin during it too. He toys with his prostate, kissing away his tears, scissoring his fingers and taking his time to make Jimin fall apart.

"Ready?" Taehyung asks.

Jimin nods, letting his head fall back. He can't think straight. Nothing makes sense anymore.

He drifts away in the time it takes Taehyung to slot himself between his thighs and lube up his hard cock. Anticipation fills his lungs and suffocates him. He sobs with relief when he feels Taehyung push in, connecting them in the most intimate way possible.

It feels like it's sating his soul. Taehyung pushes in till they're flush together, and he leans down to blanket Jimin's body with his. Slowly, he pulls back and fucks back into him. Jimin gasps brokenly, clutching at Taehyung's back.

Taehyung kisses him, and Jimin feels like he's drowning. He feels like he's reached the climax of his life, a warped version of his most desperate fantasies. Taehyung loves him, and they're making love for the first time. Taehyung loves him. He's never loved Jimin before.

Jimin feels dizzy. He loses track of time and space. There are too many sensations. He feels waves of warmth, like liquid gold, spread over his body every time Taehyung nudges the spot deep within him. He feels pride when he hears Taehyung tell him how well he's taking him, because it means that his body was made for Taehyung.

He can feel the way he stretches to accommodate Taehyung every time the other man pushes inside, slow and deep.

"I wanted our first time to be initiated by you," Taehyung says against his lips. "I'm so happy."

Jimin feels tears leak out the edges of his eyes. It's too much for him to handle.

He cums with a full bodied jerk, splattering all over his own stomach. Taehyung fucks him through it, hips rolling into him powerful strokes. Jimin's sensitive rim catches on the length everytime, and he writhes when it becomes too much to handle.

"Nnngh-"

"Shhh, baby," Taehyung coaxes, kissing him. "My beautiful Jimin."

Jimin feels his eyes roll into the back of his head, goosebumps spreading across his skin. He feels beautiful in that moment, even though he's not. He's bleeding and bruised. But neither of them seem to care.

The world starts to swim in Jimin's eyes even though he has them shut. This is too much exertion for him, especially when he's already so weak. He starts to lose sensation, his hands sluggish and slipping off Taehyung's shoulders.

"I love you, Jimin. For me, it's only you. It'll only ever be you."

A shaky breath leaves Jimin's mouth in response, swallowed up by a deep, languid kiss from Taehyung.

The moment Taehyung cums, it's only a few seconds later that Jimin falls unconscious.

-

When Jimin wakes up, it's to a devastating ache washing over his body. He quickly realizes that it's the pain, because every inch of him hurts. His skin feels tight in some places where blood has dried, and all he can feel is agony.

His eyes creak open, and he looks around him. It looks like it's just breaking dawn, because it's not too bright but he can see hints of the sun through the curtains, a demure bluish hue of light spilling into the room. He can also hear birds chirping outside. He feels nailed to the bed, weighed down by the pain.

Jimin looks down at his body, because there's something on him. He realizes that it's Taehyung's hand, resting protectively over his stomach, the skin bruised a nasty blackish purple in harsh streaks, the flesh underneath overwhelmingly sore and damaged. Taehyung himself is deeply asleep. Jimins sees that he isn't wearing any clothes, and realizes that he isn't either.

The events of the previous night descend over him.

Jimin had sex with Taehyung.

He had sex with Taehyung. Last night, he gave himself to Taehyung willingly. He accepted his love…actually drowned in it. Took him and accepted him back like nothing happened.

Jimin tries to get off the bed, falling to the ground when he attempts to stand on his bad ankle. He bites down his sob, and he barely manages to crawl his way to the bathroom before he throws up in the toilet. Taehyung still snores lightly inside the bedroom.

“No, no…” Jimin sobs. He feels disgusted. He feels sick. He doesn’t know what’s happening. He can feel Taehyung’s cum drip out of him.

It feels like it’s the end of the world. He curls up into a ball and tugs at his hair, eyes wide and bloodshot, streaming tears.

And the worst part is, Jimin finds himself loving Taehyung now. Even now. Despite his broken bones and damaged body and mind. His shattered constitution and spirit.

It terrifies him. Disgusts him. It shouldn’t be possible.

What’s happening to him? How could this happen? What’s wrong with him?

He can’t let it go this far. The panic attack begins to consume him.

And then, he thinks about Jungkook.

He cheated on Jungkook. Jimin sobs, the guilt washing over him. It makes him go insane. His vision spins, his mouth dry. This can't be real. What has he let himself become? Jimin feels like he's nothing but a ghost, waves of anxiety churning thick in his blood. He can feel his damaged organs wring inside of him with distress.

Jimin doesn't want to live if this is where he's headed…there's no point. He's losing himself. He's going crazy and it might already be too late to stop it. He can't let himself fall apart like that.

Jimin's shaking again. He feels sick to his stomach. It feels too final, all of this.

Jimin can't go on like this…it's too much. He can't keep living like this, in permanent agony. He can't grow to like this. He can't…he can't…he has to stop it…

Jimin crawls out of the bathroom with a single minded purpose, hiccuping as he sobs. He mourns. Jimin mourns all of it.

Jimin grips the bedside table and hauls himself up to his feet, no matter the protest of his body. He bites down the pain because nothing matters right now than what he has to do. He limps, leaning more of his weight on his right foot, and yanks the thin cotton bedsheet off the bed.

He limps his way to the living room, hauling the sheet behind him.

Jimin abandons it temporarily before he grabs one of the dining table chairs, dragging it to stand underneath the ceiling fan. He even falls as he tips over with the weight of it, but picks himself back up and completes the task.

Jimin can't see through his tears.

He picks up the bedsheet and climbs up on the chair, biting down a scream as he accidentally puts pressure on his left foot. It serves as another reminder to stop it before the pain becomes

too much to handle.

Jimin reaches up and loops one end of the bedsheet round the ceiling fan, securing it before he grabs the other end and wraps it around his neck.

Jimin can't do this. He can't exist anymore like this, losing himself. He'd rather die. He'd rather die on his own terms. He can't save himself. Too much has happened. It can't be fixed. This is his only escape.

Jimin's hands seem to move themselves as he secures the noose, making sure it's tight enough that it won't unravel before he dies, if at all.

Jimin closes his eyes.

"Goodbye, hyung. I love you so so much. Thank you for always loving me," He speaks to Yoongi, even though no one can hear him. "I love you, Jungkook. I'm sorry it took me so long to say it. I'm sorry mom and dad. I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

Jimin cries. He thinks about all of his memories, what he thought his life would be like. He thinks and thinks till he can't anymore, desperate to revisit all the sunny spots of his mind till they cease to exist along with him.

A whole life, gone. Hopes and dreams and a million smiles and tears.

Jimin would rather end it before he forgets any of it, which is where he knows he's headed.

He steels himself, and jumps, kicking the chair behind him so it falls to the ground with a loud clatter.

Jimin chokes immediately, the bedsheet digging into his throat and cutting off his oxygen. His legs dangle beneath him, bloody and bruised, his left ankle bent at an awkward and

jarring angle.

He hangs, slowly letting his mind slip and melt away into nothing. He can feel his soul pouring out of his ears. The world slowly starts to fade in his eyes and he shuts them, letting it happen and welcoming the feeling. He's miserable but thankful for the escape, lets it take him willingly.

Jimin can't hear at this point, the blood rushing through his ears.

But then the pressure suddenly disappears. Jimin's falling, and then he's caught by a pair of arms. He opens his eyes, coming face to face with Taehyung. He hears the clatter of a knife falling to the ground.

"If you kill yourself, I'll kill myself too. I have nothing else to live for. We have nothing to live for but each other. I'll follow you wherever you go."

Jimin doesn't have the energy to cry, or scream, or shout. He doesn't have the energy to do anything. He's given up. He doesn't want to think anymore. He can't do it. He's done fighting. He doesn't have it in himself anymore.

"I want to show you something," Taehyung says then.

Jimin stares at him with blank, dead eyes.

Taehyung carries him as he walks, coming to a stop right before the locked bedroom. The one Jimin hasn't ever been inside of.

Taehyung turns on the keypad and inputs the code. Jimin isn't lucid enough to see it, but it's his birthday.

He turns the door handle, and opens it.

It’s pink. It’s all pink. There are pink walls and curtains and the floor tiling is pink with fuzzy pink carpets all over the space. There’s a pink sofa, and a pink dressing table with a vanity mirror. It’s full of makeup and nail polish and hair clips. There’s a desk with little easels and art supplies too. There’s a pink closet with glass doors, and you can see hanger after hanger of babydolls and lingerie sets displayed inside. Jimin sees another pink cuddle chair in the corner, and a storage unit full of yarn and glitter and cute stationery. There’s a shelf full of books too, and photos of the both of them from back when they were together framed on the walls.

There are a few plastic letters stuck to the wall above the window.

Jimin’s room

“I wanted to save this as a surprise for you,” Taehyung explains. Jimin just stares, hanging limp in his arms.

Taehyung walks them over to the sofa, which faces a blank wall. He sits down, and arranges Jimin such that he’s sitting in his lap, leaning back against his chest.

“I know you deleted the video,” Taehyung says. “But I don’t care.”

Jimin just stares ahead of him blankly.

Taehyung presses a button, and the curtains of the window start to close automatically. When they do, it’s like they’re in a theatre, enveloped in darkness. Taehyung presses another button, and a projector turns on. It starts playing a video onto the blank wall.

It’s a video of them having sex. Jimin remembers this day. It was the day after his term end exams in school, when he’d rushed over to Taehyung’s house in a bid to see him after weeks of no contact due to the need to study. He watches himself as he spreads his legs in the video, letting Taehyung fuck him.

“I wouldn’t keep all of our memories on a cloud someone could hack into. It’s all here just for us to watch anytime we want.”

The video plays till it ends. And then another one starts playing. And a different one after that. They just keep playing, on and on and on. Hundreds of videos with his face plastered all over them, his naked body spread out on the screen.

It was all for nothing, everything he did. He deleted the video, but there’s a million more he wasn’t even aware of.

Jimin just stares, eyes hooded and blank, the static in his brain building.

It builds and builds.

Till all he feels is nothing at all.

Beautiful artwork created by Alek.Dar!

Chapter End Notes

Chapter summary : This chapter was about Jimin's time thus far in Taehyung's capture. Taehyung has moved to a new house which he has designed to keep Jimin in - with locks and no access to things Jimin can use to hurt himself/escape. The situation is bleak and Jimin realizes that if he cooperates with Taehyung, he will not be hurt. He learns this the hard way at several points. Jimin hatches a plot to escape - to drug Taehyung with sleeping pills - but is eventually caught while trying to call Yoongi and is brutally beaten. The chapter ends with him mentally giving up, and discovering all the videos Taehyung has taken of him over the years without his consent.

And that's the 16th chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 17: Time In Disguise

Chapter Notes

Here's the seventeenth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What’s going on? The vibe here sucks,” Taehyung laughs, approaching Sunwoo’s little living room where everyone’s huddled around the small table. People make space for him and he sits down.

“Yoongi’s brother is missing,” one of them fills in. “We’re trying to help him out.”

“You have a brother?” Taehyung asks, raising an eyebrow. His hair is wet and pushed off his forehead, evident that he showered at whatever med school accepted him before he got here.

Yoongi nods hesitantly, still somehow reluctant to acknowledge Taehyung's presence. He's surprised Taehyung doesn't know - considering his brother being gay was major gossip for a while. Whoever had anything bad to say paid for it, but still.

"Damn. That sucks. For how long?" Taehyung asks, pouring himself a shot of soju.

"Nearly 2 months now," Yoongi responds.

Taehyung hums in response, seemingly understanding and sympathetic, but even that feels fake. Or perhaps Yoongi's just biased enough to fucking hate and nitpick everything Taehyung does.

"Can you show me a picture?" Taehyung asks, propping his arm up on the table and resting his chin in his palm. "Just so I can check if I've seen him before."

Yoongi reaches into his back pocket and pulls out the folded poster he always keeps with him. If he had his backpack with him, he would have had copies for everyone here. He hands it to one of the guys who passes it to Taehyung where he sits opposite him.

Taehyung takes his time opening it up, long fingers tracing over the fold marks. He does it torturously slow, and it feels almost mocking. But he's always been one for theatrics. He opens it up eventually, smoothing out the lines as he takes in Jimin's picture and information.

His eyebrows rise.

"Oh, him."

Yoongi's posture straightens slightly.

"What d'you mean?" He asks, voice gruff. "You've seen him around?"

“In school, yeah,” Taehyung responds, humming as he thinks. “I thought you guys were fucking. Didn’t know he was your little brother.”

Yoongi’s jaw steels, eyes turning hard. The room falls silent at the comment.

Sunwoo laughs awkwardly, clapping a hand on Taehyung’s shoulder. “He’s just messing with you, Yoongi. Quit it, dude.”

“Sorry if that made you mad,” Taehyung drawls, not backing down, tracing the rim of his little shot glass with his finger. “It was just an easy conclusion. You guys were always together, super touchy touchy. Guess I just got the wrong impression.”

“Yeah, I’m not surprised,” Yoongi responds, huffing a laugh. “You never really were the brightest.”

Taehyung pauses for a second. And then he smiles, wide and then wider, his upper lip stretched thin over his pearly white teeth. His eyes are still cold, soulless like they’ve been since he was a child.

“Guess I got the right impression there, huh?” Yoongi adds, returning his smile.

Taehyung stares back, still gripping his empty shot glass, eyes not leaving him for a second.

Sunwoo coughs.

“Anyway,” he begins awkwardly. “Let’s start drinking and get this party started.”

Everyone else echoes the sentiment, cheering and filling all the available glasses on the table. Yoongi picks up his glass once everyone's is full, and so does Taehyung.

They clink their glasses together and down their drinks. The alcohol burns down Yoongi's throat, just as his phone vibrates in his pocket. He takes it out, squinting at the screen in the dim light of Sunwoo's living room.

Jeon Jungkook: Yoongi-ssi, where are you? Just checking in.

He quickly types out a response

Me: I ran into a friend. I'll be back late.

Jeon Jungkook: 👍

Yoongi deflates slightly. Always nothing but a disappointing, fruitless conversation.

"Taehyung, your skin's all healed up now," someone says. Yoongi looks up, pocketing his phone.

"Huh? What do you mean?" Taehyung asks. He's got that lopsided smile on his face again. How are the rest of these people tolerating him? Is no one else able to see through his shallow facade of approachability? Yoongi knows there's a psychotic side to him - still remembers the way Taehyung destroyed his locker after Yoongi defeated him in the fight he picked. He didn't complain because there was no point, Taehyung wouldn't be punished and it would just make things difficult for Yoongi's parents. Also because everything in that locker was expendable and could easily be replaced - even the picture of him and Jimin. It was just a copy. The real one sits snug in their family photo album somewhere back home, brewing itself a nostalgic scent that transports you to a time lost and gone by. But still, that sort of animalistic rage - a product of narcissism - isn't normal. He pretends not to care about a thing in the world but to Yoongi, it's very obvious that he does. And that his big fat ego is made of nothing but fragile glass that shatters nice and loud when broken.

“Your face was all banged up the last time I saw you,” the other guy continues. “Like you’d gotten scratched up all over your eyes and jaw. I ran into you on the street a few months ago.”

“Oh, yeah,” Taehyung laughs, eyes flitting to Yoongi for a second. “I got into a fight. The wounds were early enough in its stages so I was able to get the scars removed surgically. No biggie.”

“Only a dumbass would pick a fight with you,” someone laughs.

“Heh,” Taehyung chuckles. “It wasn’t a fair fight. Not for them anyway. That was all the damage they did.”

It’s the way he says it. Like he’s so proud.

“Still the same old bastard,” Sunwoo laughs. “Why don’t you hang out with us more? This is the first time most of us are seeing you since school. Bring Hyungsoo next time, he didn’t answer my call.”

“Yeah, he’s busy,” Taehyung smiles.

“That’s no excuse. Think about it, we’ve got *Min Yoongi* here. I never would’ve imagined that happening in a million years. It’s like a wild card celebrity appearance.”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m sure he’ll come next time. His legs are still fucked - he’s been going to physical therapy but it hasn’t been helping much. He can barely walk without his knees giving out three seconds in.”

“Damn…” Sunwoo says. “Hyungsoo in a wheelchair. Still have no idea how the fuck that happened. Feels like you can’t predict anything these days.”

“Let’s try that out,” Taehyung says, reaching into his pocket and rummaging for something.

“Try what out?”

“A prediction.” He looks up at Yoongi, who meets his gaze unhesitatingly, before he continues speaking. He takes out his fancy wallet and pulls out a coin. Yoongi notices that the skin of his right palm almost seems raw and scabbed over by the edges, like he’d has a nasty burn that’s only just healing.

“Heads means you find Jimin, your…*little brother*…allegedly. And Tails means…well…”

Sunwoo laughs awkwardly again, trying to grab the coin out of Taehyung’s hand. “Hey, Tae, c’mon, don’t mess around with stuff like that.” His tone is tense, like he’s trying to defuse a bomb. The others agree, coaxing Taehyung to stop it or change the topic.

Yoongi almost dares him to do it. To see if he’d have the audacity, or would so freely give Yoongi the implicit permission and a valid reason to beat the shit out of him in front of these people he’s clearly trying to impress.

“Hey, don’t-”

Taehyung flips the coin, and slaps his hand over it to hide the result once it falls flat on his palm, all while still maintaining eye contact with Yoongi.

“Any guesses?”

Sunwoo’s gone silent too now, as have the rest. The air is thick with awkward and disbelieving silence. Yoongi just stares back.

Taehyung lifts his hand.

It’s heads.

“See?” Taehyung says, lifting it up and showing it to Yoongi. He then looks at everyone else, taking in their stilted expressions and reactions. He huffs a breath, rolling his eyes then. “Guys, give me a break. It’s a fucking trick coin.”

He flips it over to reveal that both sides are heads.

“Just wanted to give Yoongi a bit of morale.”

The air of the room lightens just the slightest bit then, with some of the guys laughing awkwardly and acting surprised. Some of them playfully chide Taehyung for messing with them. Taehyung just laughs, his shoulders shaking with his chuckles. Sunwoo squeezes Yoongi’s shoulder placatingly.

Taehyung continues to laugh, his eyes meeting Yoongi’s once more for a brief second before he downs another shot.

“Tae, your phone’s going off a lot.” Someone says, and everyone’s attention is drawn to the device that’s constantly vibrating over the table.

Taehyung picks up his phone then, squinting at the screen for a few long seconds before he stands up.

“I think I’m gonna head out. This was fun, guys,” he smiles, slinging his bag back onto his shoulder.

“What?” Sunwoo demands, standing up too. “What about all the chicken you brought? You just got here!”

“I gotta get home. Something came up. Eat well everyone,” Taehyung answers, the smile still on his face. Somehow it doesn’t look as forced as it always is.

“All good?”

“Yeah, yeah. Never been better,” Taehyung grins, his cheeks looking a little flush and his eyes finally alive. It’s a bit jarring. “See you guys. And Yoongi, it was great meeting you after so long. We should do this again. Good luck.”

Yoongi doesn’t respond.

Taehyung leaves then, and Sunwoo starts apologizing to Yoongi the moment the door’s shut.

“Sorry, you know how he’s like that. I’ll talk to him before we meet next time.”

“I’m not really surprised,” Yoongi shrugs. “He was always an asshole. Entertaining him won’t help me find my brother.”

“That’s right. You’re a really cool guy, Yoongi. I hope we can hang out more.”

Yoongi just nods.

He doesn’t stick around for too long after that. He downs a few pegs, having no appetite for the chicken Taehyung brought that the others scarf down. And no matter which way he looks at it, being in a room full of cheerful people who are laughing and chatting is not the place he’s in the headspace to be in right now, hasn’t been for what feels like forever.

Thankfully, no one protests too much. Sunwoo promises to be in touch, and then Yoongi decides to walk home. A 20 minute stroll rather than a 5 minute bus ride. But the breeze feels heavenly against his skin, and the streets are surprisingly not as crowded as they usually are.

It's well past 11pm now. Yoongi keeps walking, and sighs once he finally sees the familiar outline of the apartment building down the road. He can see through their window on the 4th floor that the lights are on, which means Jungkook's still awake.

Yoongi takes his time entering. He hopes the people he met with today will find any leads, or will actually help like they said they would. Perhaps all they said were simply false promises since Yoongi was right in front of them. Which he wouldn't take personally, considering he knows how busy things are for everyone. But still, it's sad to think about.

Yoongi gets the front door open, and Jungkook looks up at him from where he's seated on the couch and working on what looks to be an assignment.

"Hey," Jungkook nods before looking back at his screen.

"Don't you have work at 4 am tomorrow?" Yoongi points out aloud, knowing that Jungkook usually attempts to sleep early on this day of the week. *Attempts* being the keyword because neither of them have slept properly in the longest while. He's stretched too thin, in time and energy, and Yoongi is slowly starting to understand what Jimin meant when he said that Jungkook was an extremely hard worker.

"I do," Jungkook responds, returning his attention to his laptop. "I've just been fiddling around with this submission. And I thought I'd wait up for you in case you found anything and wanted to talk."

"I didn't find anything," Yoongi reveals. "I ran into some friends from back home. I told them about Jimin, and they said they'd try and help. Not sure if they meant it though."

"That's nice," Jungkook says, sounding tired. "I wish I had friends we could ask. Everyone at uni is super busy and they've already done all they can."

There's a few beats of silence then, only cut through by the sounds of Jungkook typing. He's got bags under his eyes, and his hair looks dishevelled. His lips are chapped, and he looks like he's an inch away from either passing out or crying.

"Do you…" Yoongi starts.

Jungkook looks up at him once more, raising an eyebrow.

"Do I what?"

"Do you think we'll find him?" Yoongi asks. Perhaps all the alcohol is getting to his head. "I mean…I just…do you think…"

"Yeah. I do." Jungkook's response is immediate. "We'll find him. I know we will. Just think about how he is waiting for us, for *you*. That's all I can think about. We can't let him down. I know you've had something to drink, but don't ever ask yourself that question. We can't lose morale."

"I'll never lose morale," Yoongi snaps. "I-"

"Don't doubt that we're going to find him." Jungkook's interjection is firm. "We are. It's just a matter of time. And as much as how wrong it is, the letter the cops received is a good sign. He's still alive and well. We need to always remember that."

Yoongi doesn't respond then. He wordlessly walks toward the bedroom door. Jungkook speaks just as he's about to enter and shut the door behind him.

"If you haven't eaten yet, I've left a bowl of noodle soup in the fridge."

Yoongi grunts in response. He closes the door.

He's quick to shower and change into a fresh set of clothes, settling into bed shortly after. He tosses and turns, staring up at the ceiling like he usually ends up doing most nights. He can feel the anxiety start to eat into the sparing drowsiness that he had. Intrusive, scathing thoughts about the future. Except it's worse today somehow. He feels haggard, worn out and more susceptible to negative thinking than he ever has been so far.

Yoongi eventually sits up, leaning back against the headboard. There's some light seeping in through the crack underneath the bedroom door, which tells him Jungkook is still awake, probably still working in the living room. Yoongi sits there, just staring ahead of him, spacing out.

Until his phone vibrates.

He slides his hands through the sheets to find it, but ends up knocking the device off the bed once his hand smacks against it mistakenly. It bounces against the bedside table and clatters against the floor.

Yoongi sighs, rubbing at his burning eyes. He gets out of bed, bending down to pick up the device that's half underneath the bed at this point.

He grabs it, but notices the way his fingers brush against something else. Yoongi frowns, sinks to his knees and peers underneath the bed, eventually finding a box. Taking it out so he can give it a better look, he sees that it's an old shoe box decorated with stickers and doodles on the outside.

Yoongi's nerves surge, they always do when he finds something new. He rushes to turn on the night lamp and opens the box when he can see everything properly.

It's full of cards, papers, and photographs. A few knick knacks too. It doesn't take Yoongi much time to figure out that it's Jimin's memory box. He had one back home too, and the old box still sits safe and sound in his wardrobe. This must be his new one.

The whole box smells like Jimin, a natural sweet scent he's had ever since he was a child. It makes Yoongi feel dizzy, and his heart twists in his chest, throat heavy.

There's the ticket stub for Jimin's first train ride to Seoul back when he moved here. There are little coins and dried flowers and napkins from restaurants that Jimin has signed along with whoever he was with.

Yoongi picks up a strip of photos which were obviously clicked in a photobooth. It's of Jimin and Jungkook. Jimin's holding a small bouquet of roses, and their heads are pressed together. They're even kissing in one of the pictures, cheeks flushed and smiles brighter than the sun. Jungkook's got his arms around his brother, and he's wearing a full shirt and pants - a stark contrast to the hoodies and baggy t-shirts Yoongi's always seen him wear. Jimin's dressed well too, a pretty butterfly barrette in his hair. Yoongi remembers Jimin telling him that it was a gift from Jungkook. There's some writing on the back.

Our first date

So Jungkook got Jimin roses and a gift for their first date. And dressed up too. Even though they live together. It's earnest and innocent in a way that finally doesn't trigger Yoongi's usual apprehensiveness - because it's a clear indicator that Jungkook is a good man, who would make a good boyfriend for his brother. Someone who loves and dotes on Jimin just like he deserves. There are heaps of pictures happier than the last.

Yoongi swallows heavily. There are so many little mementos; receipts, notes, handwritten cards, doodles, heaps of pictures with friends.

Yoongi then finds a ziplock bag that's at the bottom of the box. He opens it, takes out the first item, and there's really not much he can do to stop the tears in his eyes.

They're all stuff related to him. Things Jimin has kept and cherished about Yoongi, kept safe and sound in a little bag. There are the letters Yoongi used to make a point to send him the moment they started living apart, because they've been playing a game ever since they were younger where Yoongi would slide letters underneath Jimin's door. They kept the tradition, and he now knows that Jimin has cherished and treasured every letter Yoongi has sent him

over the last two years. There are pictures, bottle caps, receipts from when Yoongi visited him and even more from their little trip to the beach a year ago. Birthday gifts, notes, even a few childhood pictures.

Yoongi brings his hands up to his eyes, snuffing out the tears that leak out the edges. His throat wobbles, and his breathing is choppy as he tries and fails to quell the breakdown. It feels like trying to keep control of a moving car that's already swerving off course. He hasn't cried properly ever since Jimin disappeared, and the weight suddenly grows too heavy to bear.

"I can't lose you.." Yoongi sobs. "I can't…"

His fingers tremble, and his whole body feels cold and clammy. He knows he's sweating, and his heart wrenches, the pain sharp and unforgiving.

There are too many thoughts echoing inside of his brain, all of them crashing against the innards of his skull. About how he's failed as a brother, not just to prevent this, but also in failing to fix it. Jimin's been missing for months now. Who knows what he's had to go through in all of this time. How did he not know that Jimin was seeing someone, and that this person hurt him. He was busy, yes, but that's no excuse at all. His negligence has reaped its results.

His skin prickles. Everything feels too cold. His chest is wrung tight and the ache threatens to consume him. His tears are sticky and endless in the way they cascade down his cheeks, somehow scorching yet icy cold at the same time. Painful in a way he cannot bear.

There's a knock on the door.

"Hey, Yoongi-ssi? Are you awake?" Jungkook's voice rings out through the door.

Yoongi doesn't respond. He just tries to straighten his jaw and smoothen out his features but it does nothing to really quell the breakdown. The calm demeanour he's trying to put together keeps breaking because there are too many cracks to put it together in any convincing way.

Jungkook opens the door, just a crack, peeking in slightly.

"Sorry, just checking because I thought I heard something-" Jungkook starts, then falling silent once he takes in Yoongi's pale, sweaty, tear-stricken face. "Oh."

"Get the fuck out of here," Yoongi snaps, voice hoarse. "What's the point of knocking if you're just gonna barge in anyway?"

It's rude, and uncalled for. And Yoongi realizes that at the end of the day, this is Jungkook's house.

But Jungkook…now seems to have grown used to Yoongi's scathing words. His eyes don't widen with hurt the way they usually do.

"Sorry, but I just had to check. You wanna talk about it?" Jungkook asks, taking a step forward.

"What's there to talk about?"

Jungkook sighs, but he doesn't come any closer. "I know how much you love him. And how much he loves you. As hard as this is for me, I know none of it compares to what you are going through right now. Jimin has told me plenty of times about the childhood you gave him."

Yoongi stares. Jungkook continues talking.

"If I'm being honest…" he starts. "I don't really see the warm, friendly, fair yet firm brother he always spoke about. And I do understand why, you probably don't see me as good enough for Jimin in the first place. And I'm still practically a stranger to you, we don't know each other very well. But…what I do know is that none of this is your fault."

Yoongi looks away, his eyes falling to the floor. His hands ball up into fists, nails etching little bloody crescents into the heels of his palms. His chest heaves. The tears have dried, but breathing is still difficult, and he still feels nauseated and panicked beyond description.

"Oh, that's Jimin's memory box," Jungkook says, having noticed it where Yoongi left it on the bed.

Yoongi nods.

"I remember him showing it to me when I first saw it, back when we just started dating," Jungkook recounts. "He let me touch everything except the little bag with your stuff. He was so careful with every item, took each one out with gentle fingers to show me, with so much care to make sure nothing creases. You are the most important person to him."

Yoongi grits his teeth harder.

"We're going to find him. It's taking time…but we will," Jungkook says. "I don't blame you for this. Jimin would never blame you for this. We need to focus our energy on bringing him back. And I know he'll come back to us. I can just…feel it. If Jimin knew you were feeling this way, based on how much I know he loves you, it would break his heart."

"But what if-"

"We're not here for *what ifs*. We're going to find him. Something has to break," Jungkook insists. He sounds calm and so sure. It's probably a desperate delusion, but Yoongi knows deep down that it's the mindset they need. That Jimin deserves.

Yoongi stays silent.

“Keep yourself together. You’re allowed to feel pain, but don’t start grieving. That process will consume you. And I’m here to objectively tell you that this is not your fault,” Jungkook adds. “Good night.”

He leaves then, shutting the door behind him. Not coddling…but not scorn either.

Yoongi isn’t sure how to feel. This…coupled with the mementos of Jimin and Jungkook’s relationship from the memory box…make him start to see Jungkook as more of a person.

They’re far from even being friends…but still.

Yoongi looks back at the memory box. He walks over to it, puts everything back where it should be, just as neatly as Jimin had left it and would want it to be.

He closes it, and slides it back to its exact spot underneath the bed.

In the right place for Jimin to open it next time.

-

Sunwoo texts Yoongi frequently. He’s even been added to a newly created group chat where everyone discusses finding Jimin. It’s not very active, but there’s at least one message a day.

Dohwan: I sent his photos to all my buddies and asked them to share it too 👍 I’ll text if I hear back from anyone

Sunwoo: That's great dude, thanks

Me: Thanks

Dohwan: You got it

Yoseop: Where did you say he studied again?

Me: Public policy at SNU, 2nd year

Yoseop: Woah

Taehyung: Impressive 😀

Sunwoo: Let's meet up today at mine for drinks. Midweek blues. We can touch base about this too

Hajoon: Fuck yeah. I'm in

Taehyung: I can't make it 😔

Sunwoo: As usual

Taehyung: got plans, sorry

Dohwan: Who's the lucky girl, bro?

Sunwoo: tonight at 9. Be there or be square

Kihoon: 🔲

Yoseop: Tae's gone offline 😂 caught red handed

Sunwoo: @Yoongi you coming?

Yoongi hesitates.

Me: I'll try, not sure

Yoongi's not sure if he wants to go, to be honest. If any of them had found something, they'd have let him know. He isn't really in the mood to hang out and get drunk.

Instead, he spends his evening searching Jimin's name, and then looking into how much hiring a private investigator would cost. He's prepared for it to not be cheap, and none of them disclose their prices on their pages. But even if he did hire someone, he's not sure what they'd do that he hasn't already done.

Jungkook's not home. He's giving an exam and will then head to work right after.

Things between them have been….better. Or perhaps it's the same from Jungkook's side but Yoongi has found himself growing more tolerant of the other man's presence. It's been a slow slide…but there's been progress.

Jungkook has been nothing but kind. While Yoongi cooks, sometimes, it's often Jungkook who always takes the initiative to prepare their meals and look after things around the house. Yoongi has started helping with bills, but Jungkook had said no at first and hadn't even been the one to bring it up. It's clear he's been raised well by loving parents, because Yoongi's overheard their conversations and knows that Jungkook comes from a simple family just like he and Jimin do. He's a hard worker, has a sense of responsibility that very few people their age do, and is soft around the edges no matter the situation.

So, Yoongi's been letting his guard down recently, over the past few days. He knows that if Jimin were here to see it, he'd sag with relief and hug him to thank him for giving Jungkook a chance.

Jungkook will return well past midnight tonight. And Yoongi knows that he'll start studying as soon as he's back, because he has his next exam bright and early tomorrow. A tough life.

Yoongi looks at the house from where he sits on the living room couch. Everything is neat, but some things are out of place; like the mug that's been washed but needs to be returned to the cabinet, and the pile of clean clothes waiting to be put away on Jungkook's bed, which is a mattress on the floor with a sheet over it. He must've woken up early and did their laundry before heading to his exam.

Yoongi stands, and starts to fix everything bit by bit. He scrubs down the stove and deep cleans the kitchen sink, puts all the utensils back where they're supposed to be. He puts their clothes away, Jungkook's in the cupboard and Yoongi's in the little shelf Jungkook offered him. He even sets a stew to boil on the stove, so that Jungkook can come back to a hot meal because he'll be tired and could use the energy boost.

Yoongi's feeling restless, so he decides to give the sheets a refresh too. He and Jungkook have been sleeping on the same ones ever since he got here.

He does Jungkook's first, because it's easier - taking it off the mattress and putting it to soak in a potent stripping mix in a bucket before it goes in the washing machine. Something his mother taught him when he was only little, because it gets every bit of dirt and grime out everything. He leaves it in the bathroom, and then goes into the bedroom to get his sheets too.

Yoongi starts to pull out the plain navy blue sheets from where they're tucked underneath the mattress, grunting a little as he does because there's a bit of resistance. He lifts the mattress with one hand and it's substantially easier now, the sheets now gliding off smoothly.

But there's a flutter of something falling to the floor just as he's able to get them off. Yoongi frowns, balling the sheets and dumping them in a heap onto the floor.

He rounds the bed to the other side where heard the noise, and sees some slivers of paper, what he realizes are printed pictures strewn over the floor. Were these underneath the mattress?

Yoongi picks one up, squinting at it.

And then his eyes widen just as his heart stops, stomach lurching. The shock consumes him.

"What the fuck?" He yells, dropping it to the ground. He's feeling nauseous, bile rising up his throat. He takes a few shaky steps back, his back crashing into the dressing table, sending a few products falling to the floor loudly.

They're…pictures of Jimin. Not normal ones, they're…

"Fuck," Yoongi spits, rubbing at his eyes. Did Jungkook take these? What the fuck?

Yoongi needs to get a closer look, because something about them seem wrong. He approaches the picture hesitantly and picks it up, making sure to cover the part with…Jimin's mouth, and the *penis*, with his hand so he doesn't have to see it. He's already sweating, his skin prickling painfully once more. He can hear the stew boiling over on the stove but he doesn't care.

Yoongi already knew that Jimin and Jungkook had…taken their relationship to the next stage. He was never told directly, nor did he expect to be told, but it was obvious in their body language and the fact that he'd found lube and condoms in their bedside table drawer his first day here. But the fact that it's been photographed and printed…

Yoongi finally wills himself to look at the picture.

"What the fuck?" Yoongi repeats under his breath, cursing. He sees that Jimin's wearing lingerie…and that should be the most shocking factor, but it's not because all Yoongi can focus on is that Jimin is crying. Panicked crying. He doesn't look happy.

Yoongi's stomach twists, his lower lip being bit bloody. A million thoughts run through his mind.

He hurries to pick up the rest of the pictures, flinching when he sees things he doesn't want to see before he manages to cover them with his hands. This part of Jimin's life is not his business. But they seem to be a series, and it grows obvious to Yoongi that Jimin was not aware he was being taken pictures of until the last few images, which are the ones in which he's crying.

Yoongi's blood boils. These pictures were kept right here, underneath the mattress. They're just like the pictures Jungkook's printed and put on the walls. There's no way Jungkook didn't do this. Or that he didn't know about them, considering he used to sleep on this very bed up until around just over a month ago. In his own house. Jimin obviously didn't want these taken in the first place so he wouldn't have been the one to keep them. It's the only possibility, the only viable explanation. Jungkook must've taken these and forced Jimin to be quiet about them…which explains why Jimin didn't share anything with Yoongi. Because Jungkook was right there to hurt him if he said anything. It can't have been the ex boyfriend, because there's no way he entered the house.

Yoongi spirals. It has to be the truth. Jungkook took advantage of Jimin…he's probably been treating him like this all along. This whole play about being a perfect boyfriend - it was all a farce.

His mind's moving too quickly to think rationally. He's dizzy with rage, teeth gritting so hard his skull aches.

His chest starts to heave with anger, fingers balling into fists and trembling just slightly.

Yoongi heads to the living room, and takes a seat on the dining table.

Afternoon turns to evening, evening turns to night.

It's 1:13 am when Yoongi sees and hears the door unlock. He stands up.

Jungkook walks in and shuts the door behind him, toeing off his sneakers. He appears exhausted, face worn out as he looks up. His eyebrows furrow once he takes in the way Yoongi's staring at him.

"Yoongi-ssi? Why are you just sitting here in the dark-"

Jungkook's caught off-guard, so Yoongi easily lands the first hit to his jaw in a hard, strong punch. Jungkook crashes against the door audibly, stumbling but having the presence of mind to bring his arms up to block his face from the next blow. Yoongi's next punch hits the side of his neck.

"What-" Jungkook attempts, successfully dodging the next hit aimed at his head by ducking.

Jungkook brings his arms up and shoves at his chest, sending Yoongi stumbling back a few steps.

"What the fuck?" Jungkook demands. He's bleeding from his mouth. Yoongi's on him once more, dashing forward and tackling Jungkook to the ground. The other man loses balance and falls, the breath rushing out of his lungs once he hits the floor.

"Yoongi-ssi, stop-" Jungkook exclaims, seeming to panic. "What the fuck happened?"

“You fucking took those pictures of him-” Yoongi demands, punching Jungkook in the face. His head swings to the side. “You’ve been abusing him all this while. I’m going to fucking kill you.”

“What are you talking about?” Jungkook demands, now blocking Yoongi’s hits. He’s fast despite being on the ground.

When Yoongi doesn’t respond, still throwing punches, Jungkook gets him in the side of his ribs with a powerful right hook. It sends the oxygen flying out of his lungs, and Jungkook kicks him off, standing up. Yoongi coughs, now on his back.

“There’s only so much I c-can take-” Jungkook says, voice ragged. “And not react. You know I respect you, but that doesn’t mean I’m going to let you hit m-me unprovoked.”

Yoongi stares up at him, still catching his breath from the hit. His side pulses painfully, the pain wedging itself into his bones.

“Are you gonna tell me what’s got you livid this time?” Jungkook demands, approaching him and sticking out a hand to help him up.

Yoongi kicks him in the shins instead, reversing their positions and getting Jungkook back on the ground. They knock over Jimin’s little trinket table in the process, little colourful crochet animals tumbling out onto the tiled floor.

“Stop-”

Yoongi attempts to punch him when Jungkook intercepts his fist with a strong hand, then using his right arm to once again punch Yoongi in the ribs, followed by a devastating hit to his stomach. Yoongi absorbs them, refusing to break and give Jungkook the upper hand.

But then Jungkook headbutts him, hard. Yoongi feels the blood start to leak out of his nose like a faucet, and he punches Jungkook in the throat just as he's kicked off once more.

"F-Fuck- fucking stop it-" Jungkook spits, ragged. He clutches at this throat, and his eyebrow has split, a trail of blood trickling down his face. He doesn't help Yoongi up this in time, instead adopting a fighting stance and bringing his arms up to ready himself. "Why the fuck are you doing this?"

"I found those pictures you took of him!" Yoongi yells, his head spinning.

"What pictures?"

"Don't fucking act stupid."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Jungkook responds, slowly. "The only pictures I've 'taken' are the ones on the bedroom wall. You've seen those"

"I'm talking about the ones in which you clearly abused him and made him cry," Yoongi spits. "The ones under the mattress. I found them, so stop fucking pretending."

Jungkook frowns, and then he lowers his arms.

"Yoongi, I don't have a fucking clue of what you're talking about right now."

"You-"

"Show me what you're talking about. If you don't believe me, you can beat me up all you want. I genuinely have no idea what's going on right now and I don't appreciate you fucking blowing up on me when I've had a fucking terrible day."

Yoongi's mouth clamps shut and he storms into the bedroom, grabbing the photographs. He powers back into the living room and flings them at Jungkook.

"Have a look."

Jungkook picks one up, narrowing his eyes just as he moves to turn on the ceiling light. He frowns immediately, eyes widening and mouth dropping open. He looks at the others too, carding through them quickly. It seems he doesn't want to look at them either.

"What the fuck? Where'd you get these? Why's he crying?"

"These were under your mattress," Yoongi says. "You kept them there."

"I don't even know what these are!" Jungkook roars back. "Stop accusing me of hurting him."

It's the first time Jungkook has ever yelled at him.

"You-You think this is me? You think I did this?" Jungkook shouts. "It's not me in these pictures! I would never make Jimin cry or force him into anything! They haven't even been clicked here!"

Jungkook starts to shuffle through them, and then flips it over for Yoongi to see.

"Do you see that desk in the background? We don't have that here. The bedframe doesn't match, nor does the fucking wall!"

Yoongi starts to sag slightly.

Jungkook's chest is still heaving, but then his eyes catch something. He squints at the back of one of the pictures, dropping the rest of the photos and bringing the one he's holding close to his face so he can scrutinize it.

"These are f-from his ex boyfriend," Jungkook stutters out in his hurry to get the words out. "Look at what's written on the back."

Yoongi snatches the picture, staring at what Jungkook's talking about.

If you'd love to tell Yoongi about us, so would I. I'm sure he'd love to see these pictures. You'd make him so proud. Gagging on cock, doing what you always do best. Jungkook would be thrilled to see these too, knowing his boyfriend's already thoroughly trained in being a whore. Along with SNU's Dean and faculty, as well your parents and all your friends. As much as I'd love to be the only one to see these, you're too beautiful not to share with the world. Don't tempt me.

I can't wait to see you again.

"He was blackmailing him," Jungkook reveals, sitting down onto the sofa to catch his breath. "It must be Jimin who h-hid these because he didn't want me to find them. This is why he couldn't fucking tell us. He didn't want these spread. Jimin probably threatened to tell you everything and got this response."

"They know me," Yoongi realizes aloud. "This person knows me. Nobody here in Jimin's life does. This is someone who knows me. They're referring to me by my first name. Has to be someone from back home, our school," Yoongi speculates, mind moving at a mile a minute.

"Fuck," Jungkook mutters, burying his face into his hands.

"I don't know what to fucking say. I don't know anything anymore."

Jungkook doesn't respond. He stands up, walks into the bedroom, rummages in there for a little bit and then enters the bathroom for what is obviously a shower. Yoongi hears the water turn on a few seconds later like clockwork.

What Yoongi also hears is the light sniffling and aborted breaths. It's obvious Jungkook is crying, and Yoongi feels absolutely terrible. As he should. He knows he needs to think about what he's just discovered, but he suddenly can't focus on much more than the rife grief tearing through his chest. He just hit Jungkook, attacked him, beat him up severely and hard enough to draw blood. Someone Jimin's age, who has done nothing but stand by his brother and stay ever patient to all of Yoongi's difficult behaviour.

And he's caused all this pain for no reason. If he'd stopped to think, he'd have noticed the writing on the pictures. Written in a scrawl that obviously does not belong to Jungkook, spewing words that clearly don't belong to him either. Scathing words do not compare to physical injuries, and what Yoongi has done is something unforgivable. It makes him nearly as bad as the person who is hurting Jimin. All Yoongi has done is worsened an already difficult situation, made Jungkook's life more difficult than it already is, more difficult than he's already been making it so far.

Jungkook's inside the bathroom for a long long while. Eventually, the crying stops. And then the clinical sounds of water flowing are all Yoongi can hear. After what feels like hours, Jungkook opens the bathroom door and emerges through a cloud of heavy steam. He's already changed into his fresh clothes.

Jungkook doesn't look at Yoongi. His jaw is already bruising, and he walks toward the kitchen with a slight limp.

"Jungkook, I-" Yoongi starts.

Jungkook doesn't pause, raise his head, or inquire. He starts fiddling around with something on the counter.

"I'm sorry," Yoongi manages to complete. "I'm sorry for the way I've treated you so far. I'm sorry for hitting you, it was out of line. I don't deserve your forgiveness, nor do I expect it. But I want you to know that I know I'm wrong and that I'll do better."

Jungkook's silent.

"Let me know what I can do to fix it."

"Treat me like a h-human being," Jungkook responds then. "That's all I want. Please leave. I want to be alone and sleep. We can talk tomorrow."

"Are you sure-"

"Yeah."

Yoongi nods although Jungkook can't see him since he's got his back to him, and heads into the bedroom, shutting the door behind him. He feels like a high-strung monster. He is one.

Yoongi has a seat on the bed. He feels the way the muscles in his abdomen contract and pulsate with pain, and he's sure he'll be bruised tomorrow. Yoongi is seldom defeated in a fight, not that he was right now but it was a good enough possibility. Jungkook put up a good fight, reserved as it was. Yoongi knows he deserves it.

He lays down, gritting his teeth as he suppresses a flinch.

Staring at the ceiling, Yoongi feels so exhausted he could die.

-

Because Yoongi now knows that the person is someone who knows him, he doesn't turn down Sunwoo's invitation this time.

He's been thinking about it a lot. It's all been marinating in his head. Someone who knows Yoongi…would have to be from back home. He hasn't met any of his friends here. And there's another way he's confirmed it. He called his mother and asked her to find the lingerie set Jimin received all those years ago which Yoongi found, and compared the handwriting on the card to the one in the picture.

It's the same. Yoongi's nerves surged as soon as his suspicion proved true. He curtly dismissed his mother's questions about what the set was doing in their house in the first place, not a conversation he had the energy to have in that moment.

What this all means is, it's someone from back home who is also now in Seoul. Perhaps one of Jimin's classmates. Hanging out with Sunwoo and the others is a great way to find out if they know of anyone else who moved here for school. He's going to keep it quiet though, because he doesn't want to risk accidentally tipping the person off.

This time, they aren't meeting at Sunwoo's place. Instead, they're all going to meet at a newly opened fried chicken restaurant that everyone's been moaning and groaning about wanting to try. It's a recipe for a long night, which means lots of conversation, and people drunk on beer who can be loose-lipped enough to let something slip.

Yoongi soon finds that he's right as the evening progresses.

They're all seated around one big, long table. Their chatter's loud and boisterous enough that other customers look at them disdainfully, and the staff shuttle tray after tray spilling with tall mugs of beer to their table.

Yoongi sits next to Sunwoo, because he's pleasant. Across from him are Dohwan and Yoseop. They're talking, and Yoongi doesn't feel like it's an appropriate time to ask his questions, wanting everyone to get into the mood of the evening first.

Everyone talks about exam season, and wails about part time jobs and failed relationships. It's a standard dinner for a group of friends that way. Yoongi participates whenever prompted to, although he keeps his responses to a minimum and just observes. The beer flows like water, and there's plate after plate of piping hot chicken being devoured.

Taehyung arrives too, surprisingly. Just a few hours late as he usually does. He sits down a few chairs away from Yoongi, thankfully. However it's still close enough for him to hear the jeering once Taehyung shucks off his jacket.

One of them tugs the collar of his shirt down from the back, peeks, whistling and slapping Taehyung's shoulder.

"Thought I saw some lines of red. Someone's scratched up Taehyung's back!"

Taehyung just laughs, tugging his shirt back up and gesturing for the waiter to come take his order. He asks for a plate for himself and another to go.

"Man gets more pussy than all of us combined…" Jinwoo whines.

"How many this week, huh?" Dohwan teases.

"Just one," Taehyung grins.

"No way. You've always had more than I can count."

"That's what happens when you're rich and look the way he does," Sunwoo fake sobs. "Although Taehyung's looking a lot happier lately…who knows why."

"I am happy," Taehyung laughs. "I guess love does that to you."

Everyone at the table yells in indignation. They immediately start to badger Taehyung about what he meant, who he's seeing.

Yoongi tunes it out, just downing his drink. He doesn't have any interest in Taehyung's sex life or relationships. While it is surprising that he'd even use the word 'love', Yoongi doesn't take it seriously for a second.

Sunwoo elbows him.

"Crazy, huh? How people change," he tells Yoongi.

"I guess," Yoongi responds, indulging him in the conversation. And also because he wouldn't brush off Sunwoo - not after how kind the other man has been. "Do you know anyone else from back home who's here in Seoul, by the way?"

Sunwoo is the right person to ask, because he's the one social butterfly who ties this whole friend circle together. He gets along with everybody, and Yoongi doesn't think this group would meet even half as much if he wasn't the glue holding it all in place.

"Hmmmm," Sunwoo thinks. He thinks for a long while, cheeks red and flushed with alcohol. There are some chicken crumbs round his mouth. "No, not really. I'm in touch with everyone I know…" he eventually says.

"Are we expecting anyone else tonight then?" Yoongi asks.

"No, I don't think so," Yoseop responds. "Everyone seems to be here. Except Hyungsoo. Oh wait, speaking of Hyungsoo!"

"Oh, right Hyungsoo! He's here in Seoul too, Yoongi. You haven't met him yet because he doesn't come out much anymore after his leg injury," Sunwoo interrupts, slapping Yoongi's back.

"Listen to me!" Yoseop whines.

“What?” Sunwoo prods. Yoongi pays attention too, raising an eyebrow.

Yoseop tears off a bite of chicken with his teeth, then washes it down with a massive gulp of his beer. It spills down his chin and stains the front of his shirt. Yoongi grimaces. Once the spectacle is over, Yoseop leans forward conspiratorily, lowering his voice.

“I called him the other day to find out where the fuck he’s at. We spoke for a while - some small talk and casual back and forth. Got him on video call so he could show me his legs- and - and!”

“And what?” Yoongi asks.

“And then I told him about how Yoongi is in town. And about how his little brother is missing. I asked him if he’d like to help or if he knew anything. And bro! He started tripping up over his words and freaked the fuck out. Went all pale and shaky. He just hung up on me and told me he wasn’t feeling well! How fucking weird is that? I’m probably gonna go over sometime and check on him. Did you guys not get along or something?”

“We barely knew each other,” Yoongi answers cautiously but truthfully. Hyungsoo reacting like that is extremely suspicious. Especially now that he knows where this person is from; back home. In all their years of being acquaintances, they’ve exchanged nothing more than a few surface-level conversations. This reaction is nothing short of bizarre.

“Then it’s super weird. Maybe he’s just scared of you…I’ve never seen him like that.”

Yoongi hums. He’s definitely going to have to pay Hyungsoo a visit. A reaction like that isn’t normal, but what it is is extremely telling. Hyungsoo started to freak out when he heard about Jimin and Yoongi being here to look for him. There’s no way he doesn’t know something. He might be in a wheelchair and is less likely to have actually been able to kidnap Jimin, but it’s a worthwhile possibility to explore.

“Yoseop, send me Hyungsoo’s address if you have it. I’ll visit him and fix everything,” Yoongi says casually. “I feel like I’m remembering some things that might have made him not like me.”

“Oh? You sure?” Yoseop asks, looking up. His mouth’s full of chicken again.

“Yeah,” Yoongi responds, smiling lightly. He takes a sip from his mostly untouched jug of beer. “Just don’t tell him anything about it. Don’t want to spook him. I’ll message him myself and tell him I mean no harm first.”

“You’re such a cool guy, Yoongi,” Sunwoo commends drunkenly.

“Yeah, you are,” Yoseop adds, eyes sparkling. “I wouldn’t give his address out to a stranger or someone he’s afraid of usually…but I know you’re not that kind of guy. Hopefully once you guys sort things out he’ll come and meet us when we get together like this.”

“Yeah. That’s the goal. Don’t want any enemies, you know?”

Yoongi’s phone buzzes once Yoseop sends him the address. It feels like he’s won a lottery, struck gold after so many uneventful weeks. Suddenly, he no longer has an urge to be here.

He tries to keep his cool, and looks up. Everyone else is drinking and enjoying the evening, even Taehyung who seems to have survived the intense interrogation about his new girlfriend.

As if on cue, Taehyung looks up. His eyes meet Yoongi’s before they curve up in a smile, and he lifts his arm to wave hello.

Yoongi doesn’t respond, rather standing up.

“Hey, where are you going?” Dohwan demands. Sunwoo and Yoseop seem surprised too.

“Gotta head home,” Yoongi says. “See you all next time.”

The others' faces are suddenly overcast with disappointment. Yoongi doesn't linger, giving Dohwan, Yoseop and Sunwoo personal goodbyes despite their incessant protests while the rest receive one general wave. He sets off into the night and its cold chilly air, feeling more satisfied than he has in what feels like forever.

-

"Hey, Jungkook?"

Jungkook looks up from where he's busy studying, textbooks spread all around him on his little desk. He'd the spent the whole day on his laptop, working on something urgent. The bruises on his face have fully developed now, nasty streaks of purple prominent over his jaw and cheekbone. There's one on his neck too. He wore a turtleneck, sunglasses and a mask going to class today.

Taking it in visually is extremely uncomfortable and makes Yoongi feel absolutely terrible, but he knows that whatever emotions he's expressing really don't compare to what Jungkook's going through and what he's put him through.

"Yeah?" Jungkook asks.

Yoongi tosses him a tube of ointment he'd bought from the pharmacy down the road. Jungkook catches it swiftly, squinting at it.

"For your bruises," Yoongi offers awkwardly.

Jungkook doesn't respond, pocketing the tube silently. He redirects his attention back to his books.

Yoongi clears his throat. Jungkook looks up once more, quirking up an eyebrow.

“I’m uh-I’m going to meet someone who I think might know something. I went out with my high school friends last night and one of them reacted weirdly when Jimin and I were brought up to them, apparently,” Yoongi explains, already dressed. He just has to put on his shoes and he’ll be ready to head out.

“This person is also from your hometown?” Jungkook asks, setting his pen down.

“Yeah,” Yoongi responds. “I have his address and I’m gonna head there right now….do you want to come with me?”

He’d been wondering when to approach Jungkook. How to do it when their equation felt so tense, air thick whenever they were in the same space.

“Right now?” Jungkook asks.

Yoongi nods, shifting on his feet. A few seconds of silence pass.

“Yeah, okay,” Jungkook nods back, shutting his books. He stands up. Yoongi sags with relief slightly, feeling a bit lighter at the positive response.

Jungkook disappears into the bedroom and pulls on a hoodie, also swapping out his casual shorts for a pair of tactile cargo pants. He puts a baseball cap on, and then gestures to the door.

“Let’s go.”

Yoongi nods, and they set off. As they walk to the bus stop, Jungkook doesn’t walk at par with him as he usually does. This time he lingers a few steps behind, yet another back mask and his hood obscuring his face from what Yoongi knows would be the attention of people they walk past.

Jungkook stands on the opposite side of the bus stop once they finally arrive a few minutes later.

“He lives around 20 minutes from here,” Yoongi explains.

Jungkook looks up and nods once more, silent. Yoongi grimaces slightly. There’s some strong breeze tonight, and it makes Yoongi’s hair dip down and tickle his forehead. It irritates him and he has half a mind to shave it all off. He’s lost track of what day of the week it is. Perhaps it’s a Monday, considering they all met yesterday. But Yoongi isn’t sure, and he doesn’t care enough to really take out his phone and check.

The bus ride is silent too. Both of them elect to stand despite the vacant seats, several feet apart. They don’t even look like they know each other. In the past, there would always be chatter and conversation from Jungkook about his theories and thoughts. There’s none of that right now. Just the sounds of the bus engine and the voices of the other commuters.

And then, there’s the walking to Hyungsoo’s apartment building once they get down and follow Naver map. It takes them through a few alleys and the map ends once they’re at the end of a quiet street with an apartment building on either side. It isn’t clear from the map which one it is.

But then Yoongi spots a ramp leading up to the entrance of one of them, and deduces that it must be this one. Upon entering the building, which thankfully does not require a security code to just walk in, Yoongi finally sees the name of the building which matches the address sent to him by Yoseop.

“He’s in a wheelchair, this guy,” Yoongi explains once they’re in the elevator heading up. “Figured out this was the place because of the ramp outside.”

“Okay.”

At least he responded.

Yoongi stays silent for the rest of the rickety ride up. This building is clean, but it's far from being new or modern. Jimin and Jungkook's is far better in comparison. But this area of town is also not the best - not in close proximity to any business districts, universities and or places where a family would typically settle down. Maybe it was one of the few accessible options Hyungsoo could find, perhaps until his therapy gets better enough that he can walk again if ever. He remembers one of the others saying something about Hyungsoo having frequent sessions.

The corridors aren't that great either. Hyungsoo lives on the 7th floor, and there's a bit of trash and cigarette butts laying around. They look like they've been here for days, or perhaps weeks.

Yoongi spots Hyungsoo's door by the number, as well as the surprising presence of a camera, and he stops Jungkook when they're a few steps away.

"Hey," he says. "I'm going to need you to be the one to ring the doorbell."

"Okay, why?" Jungkook asks.

"He might not open it, or he may freak out and try to run if he knows it's me. Pretend you've come with a package delivery or something." He picks up a box waiting outside of someone else's door for them to temporarily use, handing it to Jungkook who hesitantly takes it..

"Okay."

Yoongi waits out of the view of the camera and watches as Jungkook steps forward and rings the doorbell.

It takes a while. More than a few minutes, but finally, a voice echoes through the little intercom.

“Who’s there?”

Jungkook clears his throat.

“I’ve come to deliver a package to this address,” he answers, voice stable.

“…. from where? I didn’t order anything.”

Jungkook pauses for a second, but doesn’t falter.

“I’m from the official postal service. Someone’s sent you something through the courier system.”

“….”

“If you could please open the door. I have a few more deliveries to go after this,” Jungkook prods.

“Read out the sender’s address.”

“The shipping label’s been damaged in transit. There was a water issue in our warehouse. I was only able to find your address because it’s the only part I’m still able to read,” Jungkook responds without missing a beat.

A few seconds of tense silence pass by.

“Can you leave it outside the door, please? I’ll pick it up later. I am disabled.”

“I’m sorry sir, but I need a signature. It’ll be quick.”

Yoongi is impressed by Jungkook’s tenacity and his ability to hold the conversation and keep pushing.

Another few seconds of silence pass before they hear the lock click and see the door start to open.

Hyungsoo wheels himself out, looking meek and small. He was rather fit back when they were in school. He looks up at Jungkook.

“Where do I need to sign?”

Yoongi steps forward, and his eyes catch Hyungsoo’s once the other man looks up upon hearing his footsteps.

“Huh?” Hyungsoo balks from his wheelchair. “Min Yoongi?”

“Hey, Hyungsoo,” Yoongi greets. “Can we talk?”

Hyungsoo looks at him, and then at Jungkook. And then he panics. He attempts to wheel himself back into the apartment and shut the door, but Jungkook stops him from doing so by wedging his foot in between to keep it from closing. Yoongi dashes forward and pries the door open, grabbing the package from Jungkook and tossing it back onto the welcome mat of Hyungsoo’s neighbour. Hopefully nothing fragile.

“Just want to chat,” Yoongi reiterates, finally pushing his way into the apartment. Hyungsoo continues to dart back choppily, crashing into the wall of his foyer. His wheelchair scrapes at the paint, probably cancelling out his security deposit. Jungkook follows Yoongi inside, shutting and locking the door behind him.

“The fuck? Did you trick me?” Hyungsoo demands. He’s sweating already, face pale and eyes darting all over the space hysterically . “You just stormed in! You’re trespassing!”

“I wanted to check on you,” Yoongi offers. “Yoseop told me that he thinks you’re scared of me. I didn’t believe him, well….until now. Why’s that, Hyungsoo? We’ve hardly spoken five sentences to each other.”

“I don’t know! I don’t know anything!” Hyungsoo sobs. He’s already crying. He’s sweating so much that it trickles down his temple, his bangs starting to stick to his forehead.

“You don’t know anything?” Yoongi asks, walking forward. Hyungsoo darts backward into his apartment, wheeling furiously, unfortunately crashing into his couch and tipping over. He falls to the ground, tumbling out of his chair.

Jungkook darts forward instinctually to help him up, but Yoongi stops him by holding up a hand.

“P-Please, please leave me alone-” Hyungsoo begs, crying in earnest now. He scrabbles over the floor. “Please.”

“I still don’t know why you’re so scared of me,” Yoongi responds.

“I’m not, I’m not,” Hyungsoo repeats over and over. “I don’t have any problems with you…”

“Then why are you acting this way?” Yoongi asks. Jungkook watches silently a few feet behind them.

Yoongi taps at Hyungsoo’s sweaty red forehead when he doesn’t respond.

“What do you know about my brother, Park Jimin?”

Hyungsoo’s head snaps up then. His mouth drops open before it clamps shut, and he shakes his head fervently. His eyes are as wide as an owl’s.

“N-Nothing,” he says. “I don’t know anything.”

The worst lie that’s ever been told, obvious in every way.

Yoongi turns back and looks at Jungkook, raising an eyebrow. Jungkook meets his eyes and shakes his head, clicking his tongue.

Yoongi turns back to look at Hyungsoo.

“We don’t believe you. You’re acting really suspicious now.”

“N-No,” Hyungsoo stutters. “Please, please-”

“Did you kidnap him?” Yoongi asks.

“No!” Hyungsoo yells. “I didn’t. I would n-never. How even would I? Just look at me. I’ve never even spoken to him…”

“Then don’t you want to be a good person and tell us what you know so we can find him?” Jungkook pipes up now. “It’s obvious you know something. Don’t lie.”

“W-Who are you?” Hyungsoo asks Jungkook.

“That doesn’t matter. Tell us,” Jungkook responds.

Hyungsoo just starts to cry on the floor. Yoongi rolls his eyes and grabs the collar of his shirt, yanking him forward.

“I don’t want to have to hurt you, Hyungsoo,” Yoongi grits out. “Tell me whatever it is you know right now. Or I’ll beat the fuck out of you and tell the cops that you’re an accomplice to kidnapping.”

Hyungsoo’s face drains then, paling to a raw white. He starts to cry harder, shaking his head once more. It’s all that he can do apparently.

Yoongi’s desperate. His eyes must betray it - yearning for Hyungsoo to reveal something that will give them the answers they’re looking for. It feels like he can almost taste it. Some form of gratification, a direction, an answer. It all feels too promising. Too real to be a dead end. Yoongi doesn’t think he'd survive this going nowhere.

“If I tell you…” Hyungsoo starts. “He’ll kill me. He’s the reason I can’t walk anymore. He’ll k-kill me. He’ll kill me if I tell you. He told me not to tell anyone. I d-don’t know what to do.”

There it is.

Yoongi’s heart lurches, and he balls his fists further into Hyungsoo’s t-shirt, yanking him even closer. Hyungsoo yelps. Jungkook steps forward too, now crouching next to them.

“Who?” Yoongi demands. His heart rate has tripled, his brain quiet and focusing only on Hyungsoo.

Hyungsoo continues to cry. He shakes his head once more, sobbing.

Yoongi punches him across the face, hard. A tooth flies out of Hyungsoo's mouth, some blood splattering onto the tiled floor. Hyungsoo sobs in pain shakily, still crying, and Yoongi lifts his head up with a grip in his hair.

"Tell me, or I'll hit you again. Who are you talking about?"

"P-Please-"

"Tell me!" Yoongi roars."Who?"

Yoongi pulls back his arm, ready to punch him again but Hyungsoo cowers, sobbing.

"P-Please! D-Don't hit me…please…I'll tell you. I'll t-tell you..."

"I'm giving you five seconds to spit it out," Yoongi says.

Hyungsoo nods. His chest is heaving, and he seems to be mustering up the courage to say it. He's bleeding from his mouth.

Yoongi waits. So does Jungkook.

Yoongi's about to punch him again when Hyungsoo blurts it out.

"K-Kim Taehyung."

Yoongi doesn't react the first few seconds.

What?

“It’s Taehyung,” Hyungsoo reveals, his voice ragged. “He was sleeping with your brother. Since b-back when we were in school. A-And here in Seoul too.”

“What?” Yoongi finally asks.

“Kim Taehyung. Our classmate from high school,” Hyungsoo elaborates. “He’s here in Seoul. For medical school.”

Yoongi’s skin starts to sear with a hot, heavy burn. The surprise attacks him sharply, like a scalding knife. He can feel it in the way his stomach drops, his heartbeat thundering in his ears.

“How do you know?” Yoongi asks.

“I was hanging out with him once, sometime l-last year. He gave me his phone to order some food and I found videos of him and your brother.”

“Videos?” Jungkook prods.

“Of them h-having sex. There were hundreds of them. I don’t think Jimin knew they were taken, except in one of them in which he reacted badly. It’s T-Taehyung’s usual trick, filming whoever he sleeps with secretly…”

Jungkook’s face contorts into one of deep, barely held back disgust.

“If y-your brother’s gone missing and it’s likely to be an ex boyfriend like Yoseop told me, it’s probably T-Taehyung. When he found out that I saw the videos of Jimin he broke my nose and my legs. And then he’d l-lied to me about my injuries being minor so I tried to g-get back to my daily routine which damaged them even further. H-He’s obsessed with your

brother, he didn't want to share or hear me talking about him like he would with the girls he fucks. I'd never seen him so angry in my life, he would've killed me if he could. It was obvious Taehyung had feelings for him because he was really different with him in the videos than he usually is."

"How?" Jungkook asks.

"I s-saw one of them cuddling, and another one of them kissing and taking a nap. T-Taehyung never does that with people he sleeps with."

Yoongi can't wrap his head around it. He feels numb. He can't even feel the way his phone is vibrating incessantly in the pocket of his jeans. Kim Taehyung. Kim Taehyung? That slimy piece of shit. He was sleeping with Jimin for years, *dating*, rather, and Yoongi didn't notice? Kim Taehyung, one of the most disgusting people Yoongi's ever come across?

It all starts to make sense in a shocking, sad way. The pieces fall together.

Someone from back home. Someone with an expensive car. Tall, handsome, with a deep voice. Curly hair. Taehyung's a sicko, so it's believable that he was the one who sent Jimin the lingerie set all those years ago. He was blackmailing Jimin, and what Yoongi knows of his anger issues fit right into everything he's heard so far.

"Do you know him, Yoongi-ssi?" Jungkook asks.

"Yeah," Yoongi says. "He's a fucking asshole."

How the fuck did Jimin date Kim Taehyung? However, the more he thinks about it, the more believable it is. Taehyung is very charismatic and manipulative, and Yoongi knows that every girl in their school used to swoon for his attention. It's only the 'locker room' group that knew the truth about what he was like, and were likely coaxed into such a disgusting perspective of girls and life by Taehyung himself. He was always the person who introduced the bad things to their group - would make fun of whoever would talk about their girlfriends, telling them that all women were good for was for sex. Yoongi didn't fall for it, but he knows that Taehyung is extremely talented and adept at creating impressions on people and

persuading them to think the way he wants them to. It's not a surprise that the others soon started to follow in his stead, believing that things like sharing non-consensually filmed videos of girls was completely okay. And he still managed to maintain his irresistible sparkly clean image to everyone else. It's no wonder that Jimin didn't tell anybody about their relationship despite them dating for years, Taehyung would've convinced him not to. Yoongi's seen countless girls fall for it before. And someone as romantic, considerate and sensitive as Jimin would've made the perfect target. It would've fit right into Taehyung's single and available reputation, and would also hide the fact that he's even questioning his sexuality. And he also probably knew that if Yoongi ever found out, he'd put a stop to their relationship immediately. Probably played Jimin's feelings and thoughts like a violin. However, the fact that Jimin was a recurring presence in his life in itself is an anomaly - Yoongi knows well enough that to Taehyung, people lose their worth the moment he's done using them to get his dick wet. For him to be interested in Jimin beyond a one time exchange, let alone for years, is extremely surprising. And to know that Taehyung was obsessed with him and didn't want to share his videos with others the way he so freely did with every other poor girl who was trusting enough to give him the light of day…

And to know now, that Taehyung hurt Jimin. And that he probably has him even now, has even met Yoongi several times and pretended not to know who Jimin was, and obviously and openly mocked Yoongi despite knowing the truth - it drives Yoongi into rage.

But it's also cathartic in a way. He finally, *finally* has an answer.

He knows where Jimin is now. He now has a face and a name to put to this person he's been building up in his head for months. It's no longer an unknown man that they know nothing about, it's instead someone Yoongi has known for the better part of his entire life.

It feels like his world has turned in on itself. The shock sits so deep that he's not sure he'll ever recover from it. Kim Taehyung…it makes no sense but also seems to fit perfectly. In a way that makes Yoongi feel stupid for not realizing it sooner despite him having no way of knowing earlier.

Yoongi lets go of Hyungsoo's shirt, standing up on numb legs.

"Yoongi, p-please don't tell him I told you, please, he'll kill me-" Hyungsoo begs, clutching onto his pant leg.

“I don’t think he’s going to live to do anything to you, Hyungsoo,” Yoongi responds. “Jungkook, let’s get out of here.”

“P-Please, promise me-”

“I don’t owe you anything, you piece of fucking trash,” Yoongi spits, getting in his space once more. “You knew my brother was getting taken advantage of and you didn’t do shit to help.”

“He w-would’ve killed me!” Hyungsoo yells back. “I can’t even fucking walk, haven’t I paid enough?”

“I don’t fucking care,” Yoongi says, now finally noticing the fact that his phone is ringing. It’s vibrating in his pocket. He takes it out, seeing that the caller ID is from an unknown number.

Yoongi answers the call.

“Hello?” His voice is gruff, ragged.

“Hey, is this Min Yoongi?”

“Who’s this?”

“It’s Choi Daeun. I just saw your email.”

Yoongi straightens up once more.

“Do you have any info?” He asks. They know who it is now, but still. Daeun seems to be part of the key event that made Jimin and Taehyung break up back then.

“Yeah. I do. Fuck, is Jimin really missing?”

“Yes.”

“Fuck,” Daeun inhales sharply. *“Let’s talk.”*

“Okay,” Yoongi answers, and before he turns around to exit Hyungsoo’s apartment, he fixes him a cold glare.

“If you tip him off, I’ll do worse than what you’ve already been through. And the cops will have you marked down as an accomplice. I’ve recorded this whole conversation. Keep your fucking mouth shut.”

Hyungsoo nods immediately, and Yoongi doesn’t spare him a single glance. He heads out of the apartment, gesturing for Jungkook to follow him out. The other man shuts the door behind him gently.

“Tip who off? Who were you talking to?” Daeun asks.

“First tell me what you know,” Yoongi answers, walking down the corridor toward the elevator. He doesn’t know why he’s being so cold. Perhaps because he isn’t sure if Daeun is a friend or someone on Taehyung’s side.

“I n-need some context first. How did it happen? And when?”

“2 months ago. Someone took him from his place of work. We’ve dug out that it’s probably an ex boyfriend who he broke up with around a year ago.”

“I know who it is. K-Kim Taehyung. It has to be him.”

“Good timing,” Yoongi deadpans.

“*Huh*?”

“Nothing. Why do you think it’s him?”

“It’s a…long story. Are you ready to sit down and talk? I’ll tell you everything.”

“I’ll call you once I’m home,” Yoongi says. “Stay by the phone.”

“Yeah. I will.”

The call ends then.

“It’s the girl who quit Jimin’s job for him. The art teacher,” Yoongi tells Jungkook just as they enter the elevator.

Jungkook nods. His eyes are a bit wide and brazen, and Yoongi can’t see the rest of his face because of the mask he has on and the baseball cap.

“Are you alright?” Yoongi asks.

“No,” Jungkook responds. “Who the fuck is Kim Taehyung? I don’t know what’s going on. I don’t know how I let him get away with this. And the fact that he took so many intimate

videos of Jimin…it's just…I'm understanding why Jimin was the way he was back when we first started dating."

"He's a guy I used to know back from when I was a kid. We practiced Taekwondo together. And then we joined the same high school," Yoongi explains. "He's one of the worst people I've ever met. Treats people like they're trash, is a predator, and has the worst anger issues I've ever seen. He's a fucking psychopath. Only reason he gets away with it is because he's packaged as a rich handsome charming guy who can put on a convincing act."

They leave the building and start to head toward the bus stop. The air is chilly and it bites at every inch of Yoongi's exposed skin.

"Show me a picture. I want to see who we're dealing with."

Yoongi pauses but complies, taking out his phone and heading to Taehyung's social media page. It's nearly unbelievable how different he seems on the outside; his feed consisted of just him smiling by the pool, hanging out with friends, medal ceremonies, posing in his scrubs and more. There's nothing of the murky party scene he knows Taehyung frequents, or anything to suggest that he's anything other than a smart, friendly, perfect over-achiever and would be doctor.

It feels almost scary, how Taehyung lives two lives, and easily exhibits two completely different personalities. He hands the phone to Jungkook.

Jungkook squints at the pictures, and then he pauses, zooming into one of them.

"He looks so familiar. I think I've seen him before."

"Where?" Yoongi asks. He's having a hard time wrapping his head around any of this. There's nothing more he wants to do than to just head over to Taehyung right now. But he doesn't know where he lives, and he knows he needs to do this carefully. Taehyung might hurt Jimin if he takes the wrong step. Talking to Daeun will help, and he wants to have the conversation in a quiet place where he can take down notes.

He's snapped out of his train of thought when Jungkook speaks once they're finally on the bus. This time, they sit together.

"I saw him once in our dorm. I'd bumped into him on our floor and he swore at me," he reveals. "He was probably there to see Jimin."

"When?" Yoongi asks.

"Sometime during our first year of university. I can't tell you the exact date…but I've also seen him somewhere else."

"Try and remember," Yoongi urges.

Jungkook thinks for a while, before he freezes.

"Shit," he says. "I remember now."

"What?"

"I work at a restaurant on Tuesdays and Thursdays for the dinner rush shift, bussing tables. I'm pretty sure this guy was a customer. The day he'd come in, I'd tripped over something and crashed to the floor with all the food I was carrying. I was so sure that he'd tripped me with his leg but there was no way to prove it and he seemed really surprised too…but now that we know him, he probably did trip me on purpose. And this was shortly before Jimin started to act paranoid."

"He found the fucking restaurant you work at," Yoongi realizes aloud. "What a nutjob."

“And he seems like such a normal person on here,” Jungkook adds, looking through his social media. “Jimin must’ve been so confused, and scared. I can’t even imagine what this asshole’s putting him through right now.”

“We’re going to go get him,” Yoongi says, announcing the obvious. “I don’t want him to be there for a second longer. But we have to plan it right so it’s safe for him. Taehyung’s capable of anything, he might lash out if he knows we know. He’s sharp as hell too.”

Yeah. We’ll be careful. B-But, fuck, this means that we’ve-we’ve finally found him. Right, Yoongi-ssi?”

Yoongi’s silent for a few seconds.

“Just call me hyung.”

-

The moment the two of them enter the apartment, they sit down onto the sofa. Yoongi dials Daeun’s number, places the call on speaker and sets it onto the table. Jungkook is ready with a notepad, and his phone is recording the conversation.

Daeun picks up on the last ring.

“*Hello*?” Her voice is urged.

“Yeah. It’s me,” Yoongi says. “We’re good to talk now.”

“We? Who are you with?”

Suspicion.

Jungkook clears his throat, leaning forward.

“I’m J-Jungkook, Jimin’s boyfriend.”

“Boyfriend?” Daeun echoes. And then there’s a light exhale of breath. *“I’m glad he moved on.”*

“Start from beginning to end, please,” Yoongi cuts in.

Daeun inhales shakily.

“I met Taehyung through my ex. He was his childhood best friend, and they reconnected during university. I’m not proud of it, but I’ll be honest - I cheated on my partner with Taehyung a while after we met. We used to hook up sporadically, but it stopped once I met Jimin by accident.”

“How?”

“At Taehyung’s apartment. He’d entered before I’d left. Taehyung panicked, told Jimin I was his group project partner. Taehyung told me was single, but I suddenly saw him change into a completely different person, playing the part of the perfect boyfriend to Jimin. Jimin recognized me through my account and I thought he was sweet, so I invited him to one of my lessons. Taehyung was really mad that I did that. I wanted to tell Jimin, because he doesn’t deserve to be with someone like Taehyung, but Taehyung threatened to tell my boyfriend about us hooking up. My hands were tied.”

Yoongi listens with bated breath.

“Jimin and I…we started to grow close. He kept contacting me and I was fond enough of him that we became good friends. The guilt always ate at me…but I convinced myself that it was okay because I wasn’t sleeping with Taehyung anymore. And that keeping the peace would be best for everyone involved. It’s wrong, I knew it was wrong-” Daeun’s voice wobbles. *“I also knew that even if Taehyung and I stopped hooking up, he had others. He had hundreds of others. He cheated on Jimin as often as he breathed. It got harder and harder to survive the guilt, and I wanted to make up for it in other ways that wouldn’t jeopardize my own life.”*

Yoongi’s heart aches with the innate need to hug and comfort Jimin.

“Make up for it how?” Yoongi asks, leaning back against the sofa and closing his eyes, pinching the bridge of his nose. Jungkook scribbles everything down as she says it, his pen flying over the notepad.

“I noticed that Jimin really enjoyed things like makeup and expressing his identity through clothes and accessories that aren’t traditionally masculine. I encouraged him, and helped him bloom into the person he’d always wanted to be. He was happier. I convinced myself that I wasn’t a bad person by helping him. But what I didn’t anticipate was Taehyung getting mad, really mad.”

Jungkook pauses, and so does Yoongi, his eyes opening.

Daeun takes a few breaths before she continues.

“He was possessive in a way I’d never seen before. Whenever Jimin would talk about Taehyung casually, he’d mention a few things that weren’t normal. Like Taehyung having imposed a rule on Jimin that he couldn’t talk to other men, or go to parties. He controlled what he would wear or dress. He hated that Jimin wore makeup because he thought it was Jimin seeking attention from other men. He would regularly check his phone and monitor his messages and calls. It was such a shock for me - because it was like Taehyung’s personality did a 180. Gone was the detached fuckboy. He turned out to be a controlling, toxic, scary boyfriend with the potential to be an abuser. He’d frequently threaten to ruin my life and pinned Jimin’s actions on me. Jimin didn’t like it whenever I brought up to him that Taehyung’s behaviour wasn’t normal - he became protective of him. It was scary to see what a hold Taehyung had on Jimin - he had him eating up every word coming out of his mouth.

He'd been manipulated and groomed so deeply to believe that he deserved whatever Taehyung gave him. I didn't know what to d-do," Daeun sniffles, clearly crying now.

"And then one day, everything changed. I convinced Jimin to come with me to an art party. We roped him into wearing what he wanted, and we all headed there together. There were both drugs and drinks there but Jimin had neither. We had a great time anyway," Daeun continues. "I'd gone to the counter to get the rest of the group some water, and when I got back to them, one of my friends told me that someone had stormed in, attacked my friend and yanked Jimin away. I was fucking terrified. My stomach dropped. I knew something was wrong. They saw Taehyung drag him to one of the bathrooms, and it was locked. That's when I started to get really s-scared. I had a horrible feeling, especially since I knew what Taehyung was like when he got mad."

Yoongi's jaw is clenched so hard that it hurts.

"I couldn't open the door. So I got a man to break it down for me. And it-it was just-" Daeun sobs. "It was horrific. There was blood all over, and Taehyung had him pinned to the floor. The guy I was with attacked Taehyung to get him off Jimin, and I used the distraction to get Jimin out of there. We dashed out of the warehouse - and I realized in the car that Jimin couldn't talk straight, and he wouldn't stop bleeding. He passed out a few minutes later. I think Taehyung punched him in the head. We took him right to the hospital then."

Yoongi buries his face into his hands, his eyes burning. His heart twists painfully in his chest, wrung so tight he can't breathe. There's a cold feeling washing over him in waves. It's agonizing.

"We found out he had a severe concussion and a dislocated arm. When Jimin came to, he told the doctors that it was an accident and not assault. He had to get stitches on his forehead, and he'd been bruised all over his face. He slowly started to regain function, and I stayed with him. All he did was cry. And the entire time, Taehyung was blowing up my phone with violent threats, demanding to speak to Jimin. I never answered any of his calls or messages," Daeun says. *"Jimin d-doesn't know this, and I know it's wrong, but I took a few pictures of him once we got him to the emergency room. Just in case he wanted to get the cops involved, he needed evidence. I'll send them to you. I didn't delete them in case he needed them later. I'd never seen such violence and brutality in my life, and I took it upon myself to look after Jimin because I felt like it was my fault. Someone like him…it was nauseating and heartbreaking to see him being broken that way.*

We pooled our savings and paid off the hospital bill. Our whole art group chipped in. After that, I insisted Jimin come live with me because I was sure Taehyung would go to the dorm to find him. And I was right. He even came to my apartment building but I didn't let him upstairs. He was obsessed. Jimin even called him and told him to leave him alone but he didn't listen. Jimin was so traumatized that he could hardly speak for days. I had to tell his part time job that he couldn't come anymore, and helped him apply for a sick absence at university. He didn't eat or sleep either. But I also knew that he didn't have it in him to break up with Taehyung despite what happened, not when he loved him as much as he did. And then Taehyung got mad and told Namjoon, my ex, that we used to hook up. Out of spite because I was shielding Jimin from him. Namjoon broke up with me. It was the right thing to do ultimately, because my ex didn't deserve any of it. But it was the last thing holding me back. I ended up telling Jimin that Taehyung had always been cheating on him…with me too before I met him. Jimin didn't believe me, but I baited Taehyung into a situation where Jimin could catch him and see it for himself. It worked. And Jimin finally left him. But I know it damaged him. He cut ties with me too, because he said he couldn't believe I kept something like this from him for so long. He's right. But I still miss him. I took a year's break from my classes and moved out of Seoul because I needed a fresh start. I've been in the countryside taking an apprenticeship.That's why I didn't see your email back when you first sent it to me. My heart stopped when I read your message…I knew it was Taehyung. By everything I'd seen, there was no way he'd let Jimin live his life without him or let him go that easy…"

All the pieces have been put together. He can't feel any more gaps in it. Everything makes sense now, why Jimin was scared. Taehyung probably harassed him and threatened to spread his pictures if he told anyone. In this country, having something like that happen to you would ruin your life, as good as death in terms of career prospects and reputation. Especially with the cultural stance on homosexuality. Jimin would've had his hands tied.

He's still heartbroken that Jimin was scared of telling him, he would've figured out a way to help him without alerting Taehyung. The anger Yoongi feels now is a cold, charged one, no longer boiling hot and spilling over. It's more focused now, pointed toward an end result.

"Do you have any proof? We believe you, but just so we can cover our bases." Yoongi finds himself asking immediately. He thinks about how he yelled at Jimin and forces himself to swallow down the guilt.

"Uh," Daeun thinks aloud. *"I have these pictures…and all of the texts Taehyung sent me before I blocked him."*

"Send me screenshots of everything," Yoongi says.

“Okay, yeah. Have you found anything else?” Daeun asks.

“You called me just when I’d found out it was Taehyung through someone else,” Yoongi answers. “I went to highschool with Taehyung, actually.”

“O-Oh.”

“Someone else I know from back home told me that they used to date…and that Taehyung had hundreds of videos of Jimin on his phone that were filmed without his consent. And then you called, right after.”

“Oh my god…I’m sorry I didn’t call sooner.”

“What’s done is done,” Yoongi responds. “I’m convinced he has Jimin. I’m going to do some research just to be careful before I head over there and get my brother.”

“Yeah, I suggest you do. It’s not going to be easy. Knowing Taehyung.”

“No, it won’t. But that really doesn’t matter to me.”

“Do you want me to come down to Seoul and help? I’d be happy to.”

“No, that’s fine. Thanks for everything. I’ll be in touch,” Yoongi responds, finally ending the call.

They sit in silence for a few seconds, Jungkook and him. Perhaps it’s the shock of finally having solved it that renders them speechless, lost in their own thoughts. Yoongi was

expecting a random stranger, not a sordid reveal of someone he knows. It almost doesn't feel real, like something out of a movie. He thinks about it.

Taehyung must've approached Jimin. Jimin's too shy to have been the one to make the first move. He must've manipulated Jimin into sleeping with him, but ultimately realized that he'd caught feelings, whether he'd acknowledged them or not. No wonder Jimin was so insistent to study here in Seoul, given the fact that they would've been dating. Taehyung would've known the ins and outs of Yoongi's schedule to know when to meet Jimin without falling under his radar. And Jimin must have believed that what they had was love, until Taehyung hurt him and the truth finally revealed itself.

"Back when Jimin and I first…realized we liked each other," Jungkook starts. Yoongi looks at him. "He said a few things about him being scared that I was just playing with him, and that he knew I would cheat on him. He looked terrified. It all makes sense now, because of what he'd been through back then. Why didn't he just tell me…"

"He was scared. Probably wanted to move on and leave it in the past. It's hard to talk about things like that, especially when you're trying to start fresh." Yoongi says.

"I know," Jungkook sighs."I know. I just wish he knew that he didn't have to hide things. And that I would be there for him…no matter what. I wouldn't judge him for those photos. Or love him less. Neither of us would."

Yoongi's phone vibrates. He takes a look.

Choi Daeun: Found the pictures I took in the hospital. Sending them to you just in case you need them. I'll send you the screenshots in a few minutes.

Choi Daeun has sent you <u>six photos</u>.

Yoongi clicks them open. He nudges Jungkook to look too. He's scared, he can't handle the thought of Jimin being hurt. Having to see it might destroy him, but it's also part of the truth he's chased. Yoongi needs to know how bad it was. How bad Jimin had it, so he can make it worse for Taehyung.

None of the mental preparation helps.

All six pictures are taken from different angles, probably to accurately capture the extent of the damage. The first few are all of Jimin unconscious on a hospital bed in what is obviously an emergency room. You can hardly make out his features; his face is streaked with blue and black colouring, crusted with dried blood and even more that spills from the gaping wound on his hairline. The rest are obviously post the cleansing of his face and the wounds, with jarring stitches now where the gash was, and purple bruises over his cheekbone and temple, underneath the wound. Jimin still seems unconscious from the looks of it, and his arm's in a cast now with a brace over his shoulder.

Yoongi's not sure how much grief it's possible for him to feel. How much anger. Everytime he thinks he's already felt it all, the maximum he can possibly subject himself to and still stay sane, the bar forces itself higher each time. Jungkook's crying next to him. Yoongi doesn't have any tears right now.

He still doesn't know how Jimin went through this alone. How he didn't tell Yoongi, or reach out for help or comfort. But those are questions he's going to save to ask Jimin personally, once he finds him.

"I'm going to make a few calls, and find out what I can about where Taehyung lives," Yoongi tells Jungkook. "We have to do this as soon as possible."

"Should we get the police involved?" Jungkook asks.

"No. Not right now, anyway. They might fuck it up. Right now, we have the advantage of surprise. Taehyung doesn't know that we know it's him."

"Yeah. Yeah, you're right," Jungkook agrees.

"Let's do this. We're in the final stretch. It's going to end soon," Yoongi says. "Be ready."

Jungkook looks up at him, and smiles lightly. It tugs against the corners of his bruised mouth.

“Yeah. I will.”

Chapter End Notes

so the cat's finally out of the bag....

And that's the 15th chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 18: In Plain Sight

Chapter Notes

Here's the eighteenth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading.

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Speaking to Sunwoo, Yoseop and the others, Yoongi finds out that none of them really know where Taehyung lives.

He used to live around his university, but he moved a while ago. I'm not sure where to though. We don't see him very often so I haven't had the chance to ask, Sunwoo says.

I think he lives somewhere near Yeonhui. I saw his Snap location once, Yoseop says.

Taehyung? Knowing him, he probably stays somewhere like Hongdae or Gangnam. He loves to party and his wallet's fat enough to afford it, Dohwan says.

I don't know, Hyungsoo says.

So Yoongi settles for the only viable option. He hovers around the KU campus, specifically the gate close to the medical faculty. He gets there early in the morning, around 6 am, and waits seated on a bench across the street from the gates, where he also funnily enough has a decent view of the parking available. The streets aren't crowded right now barring old ladies on their morning walks and some breakfast cafes preparing to open for the day.

The sky is overcast and gray. Yoongi's wearing a baseball cap, a mask, and a black hoodie that work together to obscure his identity. Just in case Taehyung sees him. He doesn't want the other man to realize anything.

At around 8 am, Yoongi sees cars start to pull in, and a bustle of activity through the main gates. His eyes burn. Everyone starts to park their cars and hop off, at least the few students who are driving to class, but there's an empty space which remains occupied right near the building entrance. Must be reserved for faculty, because everyone skips over that one.

There's a healthy mix of students who arrive by bus, car and foot. Yoongi wants to believe that it means the medical faculty accepts people from a range of economic backgrounds, but it's hard to say. All future doctors either way. Yoongi wonders if they're any good.

It's around 8:30 am when he finally sees a black Palisade with tinted windows. It prowls through the gates and predictably, smoothly pulls into the empty parking spot everyone skipped over.

Was it reserved for him?

Taehyung gets out of the vehicle a few seconds later, dressed in a black t-shirt, jeans and shades. Yoongi isn't surprised to see him, but he feels a wave of satisfaction at yet another theory being confirmed.

What he also feels is the extreme urge to kill him. To use violence over strategy. To walk over to him and tackle him to the ground, strangle him, break his jaw, shatter his ribs and everything in between. His vision vignettes round the edges. He barely manages to hold himself back, staying in grasp of the big picture. What worked with Hyungsoo wouldn't work with Taehyung, because he's not scared. And it could also jeopardize everything. He can't act till he knows where Jimin is.

Taehyung looks well rested compared to most of his classmates. He doesn't bat an eye at the other students that wave him hello, ignoring them and walking straight into the building.

So this is another piece of the puzzle that's fitting in to complete the overall picture. Taehyung drives a black Palisade - just like Jimin's old colleagues remembered his ex boyfriend drove. And funnily enough, the windows are heavily tinted too.

Yoongi picks up the phone, and calls Jungkook.

"Hey," the boy answers on the first ring.

"I found him. The car matches, he drives a Palisade."

"Okay. That's good," Jungkook responds. *"Should I head over there?"*

"Yeah. In a while. We'll tail him once his classes end."

"Okay. See you in a bit, hyung."

"Yeah."

Yoongi sighs, leaning back against the bench. He whiles away his time, his leg bouncing impatiently as the hours tick by. He desperately needs to know where Taehyung lives. The fact that he's being so secretive about it is worrying enough.

The lunch break starts at 12:30pm, judging by the outflux of tired looking students, but Yoongi doesn't see Taehyung leave the building. He feels like his back and thighs have gone numb sitting here for so long but he won't move an inch. He's not going to let any of this slip through his fingers.

Jungkook shows up eventually. He makes his way to Yoongi in a fast jog, almost crashing into the bench as he takes a seat.

“I ran out of class, bolted out as soon as I handed in my paper” he pants out. “Sorry I’m late.”

“You didn’t have to do that. I could’ve handled it.”

“I think we’re way past debating things like this at this point. Two heads are always better than one. And plus he knows you, so maybe it’s safer if I do the approaching if necessary - he wouldn’t recognize me as easy,” Jungkook responds, clearly emboldened after the successful and very rewarding run-in with Hyungsoo. Validly so, if he hadn’t done such a good job, they could’ve fucked this all up permanently.

Yoongi huffs a bitter laugh, realistic with a smattering of pessimism.

“He knows you too. You must know that. Didn’t he find you at your restaurant? And plus, knowing how fucking psychotic he is, he’s probably burned the image of your face into his retinas. Don’t underestimate how crazy he is. He’s an asshole, but that’s somehow the least problematic thing about him. He’s way more than just a self-absorbed loser. He’s more likely to attack you than he is me.”

“I can handle him,” Jungkook responds.

“He fights dirty,” Yoongi counters. He wants Jungkook to be confident, and his high morale does in turn increase his as well, but he also needs to have the other boy know what they’re getting into, and who exactly they’re dealing with. “He has no honour or code with these things. And when he loses his temper like he often does because he’s a stupid little bitch with a tall ego made of cheap glass, he’s gonna use one of the shards he’s made of to kill you even if it hurts himself in the long run. I mean it when I say he’s crazy. We need to be careful. Not just because he could hurt you, but more because he’s smart and could hurt Jimin if he figures out that we know it’s him. His reputation is everything to him. We need to avoid that happening. We need to get to Jimin and rescue him undetected, or at least make sure he’s safe and will be once we act.”

"Are you sure we shouldn’t tell the cops?” Jungkook asks meekly then, after being quiet for a few seconds.

“They’re not going to help,” Yoongi responds immediately. “My bet is he gets off scott-free even if we have evidence. He has all the money in the world for a good lawyer, and judging by this country’s judicial system and past, he’s not going to be charged with much to begin with. We need to take matters into our own hands.”

“Yeah, okay. I’ll trust you, hyung. I’ll go along with whatever you say,” Jungkook responds earnestly.

“It’s for the best,” Yoongi agrees audibly. He’s glad things between them are civil now, perhaps a little lighter than they’ve ever been thus far. It makes exchanging ideas easier.

The two of them wait for hours more after that. The sun slowly starts to grow softer round the edges, not as blaring anymore as the late afternoon sets in. Yoongi’s ratty hoodie is nearly threadbare between his fingers.

He’s impatient, ravenous for it; discovering where Taehyung lives. Once they do, Yoongi can storm right in the next day when Taehyung’s in class and get Jimin out of there. Especially since Taehyung is kept busy for so long with school. If he’s anything like he was back then, Taehyung’s going to loaf around and stay out late pretty often too, which would give them more time to jump in and act.

Taehyung emerges at 5:30 pm, seemingly freshly showered, and gets into his car. Yoongi elbows Jungkook as soon as they see him, and Yoongi keeps his eyes on Taehyung as Jungkook manages to flag down a taxi just as Taehyung pulls out of the parking lot.

They follow Taehyung for a while. Yoongi’s glad that he withdrew some cash right that morning because a good chunk is going into the cab fare. Taehyung is a smooth driver and doesn’t seem rash, smoothly pulling to stops at signals and not forcing his way through at bottlenecks that constantly sprout up considering it’s the time most students and office workers leave for the day.

“He’s heading toward our house,” Jungkook says. “Our college is just fifteen minutes away now. If he takes this left, we know he’s coming super close to where we live and study. It would be crazy if he lives somewhere around here.”

Yoongi doesn’t respond, not wanting to theorize at this point. He’d rather just remain in the present and draw only conclusions that are absolute. No energy can be spent on fruitless ideas, not at this stage.

Taehyung turns left.

Jungkook exhales shakily, leaning back against his seat. They wait for it, the both of them - for Taehyung to stop at the parking of some apartment building, or pull into a quaint lane. They watch his every movement like hawks. Every time they stop at a signal, Yoongi resists the urge to yank Taehyung out of his car and beat him into explaining everything.

Taehyung stops at two restaurants. The first is an American themed diner, and Jungkook furrows his eyebrows immediately. He stays silent though, and Yoongi doesn’t prod. Not yet anyway. Taehyung picks up two boxes of food and gets back into his car.

He continues to drive, and it’s only once they stop at a patisserie does Jungkook speak.

“These are both some of Jimin’s favourite places to eat,” He reveals, just as they watch Taehyung stroll into the pretty treats shop, gait relaxed and unhurried. “If he gets the custard tart, I’ll know it’s for Jimin. It’s their least popular item that Jimin always orders, only because he feels bad that no one else eats them.”

Typical.

And just as expected, Taehyung does emerge mere minutes later with a clear box chock full of custard tarts. Jungkook slaps the headrest of the passenger seat in front of him, muttering a quick apology to the cab driver once he complains.

“He’s going to take it to Jimin,” he exclaims. "We’re almost there. I can feel it.”

Yoongi still remains silent. He’s gnawing at his bottom lip. Taehyung pulls out of his parking space and they follow.

They drive for 30 minutes, which inches up to an hour. They leave the busy bustling centre of the city that they've been embroiled in for so long, and slowly start to sink into the suburbs. Their cab driver seems a bit uneasy too, probably confused about where they're heading. They're leaving all of the areas where universities could be.

Taehyung enters a residential neighborhood a little while later, turning into a small district with manicured bushes and cobbled roads. They're now nearly 90 minutes away from Taehyung's university, and an hour away from Jimin and Jungkook's. They start to see young mothers push their children down the sidewalks in expensive strollers, school kids and elderly on walks and snack runs. No pubs or restaurants in sight, or anything a college student would want nearby. This just seems like a quiet and calm area, an optimal place to build a family.

Yoongi and Jungkook are both surprised when Taehyung slows down in front of a two-storey house. It's not a sprawling mansion by any means - but it looks large and spacious with high compound walls and probably lots of backyard space. Would probably cost a pretty penny to rent, and looks freshly built.

"Maybe he's visiting family?" Jungkook muses.

The gate of the house starts to open automatically, wrought iron bowing inward. Taehyung drives in, and the gates close. Yoongi greedily looks at whatever bit of the house's inner space he can see while the gate's open.

"No," Yoongi responds. "He lives here."

He knows he does. It just makes sense, considering their suspicions and everything he knows so far. He barely got a few seconds to peek in, but that was enough to see the barrage of security and surveillance cameras pointing in every possible direction, aimed outward onto the street and inward through the whole area. There's no other signs of life - nothing like a swing or a barbecue set up in the garden. It looks like Taehyung lives here by himself.

But why would he? It makes no sense.

This is Yeonhui. Just as Yoseop had suggested. Yoongi knows Seoul like the back of his hand now, considering he'd travelled all over to put up Jimin's posters. Taehyung might very well be the youngest adult living in this area. No one lives here except families and the elderly. There's nothing to do here for someone like Taehyung who loves to party. It doesn't make any sense, and only does once you theorize that this shiny new address has something to do with Jimin.

"Hyung. Hyung!" Jungkook elbows him. "Look!"

Jungkook points toward one of the windows on the first floor. The house has an external staircase that leads up to the second storey, and Yoongi only now notices the taped up boxes and a worn sofa placed outside the door up there. There's a glaring red sign there with a phone number that reads:

TO LET: CALL FOR TOUR

"He's moving out?" Jungkook asks.

"I'm not sure. That's not his number." Yoongi responds, having memorized Taehyung's phone number just for moments like this. He picks up his phone and dials the number mentioned.

A tired sounding woman answers the phone.

"*Hello*?"

"Hello. This is…Min Yoongi," Yoongi introduces. "I saw a board about a home being up for rent? In Yeonhui-dong, Seoul."

"Oh," she responds, somehow now sounding even duller. *"Don't waste your time."*

*"*I'm sorry?"

It's not the whole house up for leasing - just the first floor. And the landlord's already decided who he's going to give it to. He's just put the sign up because it's part of his agreement with the real estate agency. It's all for show."

Yoongi frowns.

"Are you the current tenant?" He asks.

"Unfortunately."

"So it's just the first floor that's up for rent, then? What about the ground floor?"

"Already occupied. And he's the guy who's going to occupy the first floor too. Wants the whole house," she explains. *"Seriously, don't bother. He'll just outdo whatever offer you make with more money. I've already tried. Have a nice day."*

"Wait!" Yoongi demands before she can end the call. "Hold on."

"...what?"

"Can we meet and talk please? I just have a few questions about this property."

She clicks her tongue.

“Sir, I’m being serious. You’re wasting your time. If it were possible, I wouldn’t be getting kicked out of my own home.”

“I understand. But I still want to ask you a few things about the place.”

“Excuse me, are you hearing what I’m telling you?” She sounds annoyed but not rude. *“You’re better off looking elsewhere instead of looking here. This property has already been promised to someone else and work has already begun for their moving in. I can give you the number of my agent who can help you with finding other options. This property will not be possible for you, sir.*”

”That’s what I want to talk about. I have to know more about this property in particular, even if I can’t secure the lease. I won’t take too much of your time. Please, it would make a big difference to me.” Yoongi responds. “I need your help.”

“...I don’t even know you. This sounds like I’m walking into a scam or something dangerous.”

“We’ll meet somewhere public. Wherever you want, just outside of this street. Please. Coffee’s on me. I just need to talk to you about this house. I’ll leave you alone after that.” Yoongi pushes. “Please. It’s very important.”

“....”

“Please.”

She sighs audibly.

“I’ll be free in thirty minutes. Meet me at Mocha Town cafe, it’s a few streets over from here. I want a hot caramel latte with two pumps of hazelnut and vanilla each. We’ll talk for ten minutes and if it feels weird I’ll leave. The baristas there know me so don’t try anything funny. My friends have my live location too.”

“Done,” Yoongi agrees immediately.

“Good. Don’t be late.”

“I’ll be early. Heading over there right now.”

“Hm.”

The call ends then.

“Do you think one of us should stay back and keep an eye on things here? In case he leaves?” Jungkook asks, picking at a stray thread sticking out of the hem of his hoodie. “But on the flip side, I want to be there when you’re speaking to the tenant.”

“You’re right. I’ll record everything so you won’t miss out, don’t worry. Or I’ll keep you on call. I’ll be damned if we miss him heading to a different place. I’ll go talk to her,” Yoongi decides aloud, then takes out his phone to pull up his navigation app. He searches the name of the cafe, seeing that it’s only a six minute walk away. “You stay here with the cab and tail him if he steps out. I’ll walk to the cafe.”

“Okay, hyung,” Jungkook agrees immediately.

“Keep an eye out. We can’t afford to miss anything,” Yoongi reminds before stepping out of the taxi, making sure the mask he has on obscures his face completely. He saw a parade of security cameras on the inside of the house when the gate opened, and Yoongi wouldn’t be surprised if some of them point toward the street. Luckily both he and Jungkook have taken care to hide their identities as best they can.

And also, the fact that Taehyung’s got so many cameras in the first place is very telling that he’s paranoid - obsessive in the way he tends to get when he’s set on something. It feeds into

Yoongi's theory.

Yoongi nods at Jungkook through the car window and starts to walk, taking fast and brisque steps, but nothing too choppy to avoid drawing suspicion from the well-meaning and unsuspecting residents of this wealthy district. They seem like the type to call the authorities if they see someone out of place haunting around, and Yoongi can't take that risk.

Fade into the background, he tells himself. He keeps to himself.

As he walks toward the cafe, even during such a short journey, Yoongi realizes something. A small yet interesting detail. This whole neighborhood, from demographics of population to the pristine litter free streets and expensive paving, is extremely similar in look and feel to the neighborhood Taehyung grew up in back in their hometown.

Back when Yoongi was little, around 9 years old, Taehyung had a big birthday party. He'd handed out invitations to all of his friends, which at the time included Yoongi who was part of the little loose circle of friends forged through their Taekwondo club, the only extracurricular Yoongi's father was passionate enough about to shell out some of their precious disposable money for him to pursue. Yoongi didn't want to go, but his mother and Jimin had insisted he do.

Jimin was thrilled at the mere idea of a birthday party, his eyes going sparkly-eyed the moment he'd dug his chubby curious little fingers into Yoongi's backpack and fished out the fancy invite. He'd squealed and clapped his hands together, begging Yoongi to go and take him with. Jimin hadn't ever been to a birthday party. Yoongi had, but definitely not one of the scale Taehyung's was going to be. The invite said that the party would have pool time and bowling followed by a movie at the cinema and a barbecue dinner at a fancy restaurant for everyone. All things neither Yoongi nor Jimin had the means to experience just yet in their lives. Yoongi decided to go just to appease him, and his mother gave him 5000 won to go their local department store and buy himself a nice shirt to wear to the party, and she was able to snag a birthday gift for Taehyung through her employee discount at the store she worked at at the time. Something so simple as attending someone else's birthday party required significant investment from Yoongi and his family - not just financially, but also time and effort.

And when Yoongi's father drove him to Taehyung's house the day of the party, he remembers being so in awe of the neighborhood Taehyung lived in. It looked exactly like this posh street

here in Yeonhui - polished and flanked with large, stunning homes. Manicured bushes, security outside, fountains and large sprawling lawns, multiple storeys with tall gates, sparkling pools and gazebos. So different from the lower middle-class neighborhood Yoongi lived in, where tiny homes were packed together like sardines. When he entered Taehyung's house, he realized the difference in their lives even more. Taehyung's bedroom was three times the size of Yoongi's entire home, and he had yet another bedroom devoted to his video game hobby. Not to mention the several other bedrooms that were readily available for Taehyung, the privileged only child of one of their town's richest families, to use at his fancy. Yoongi's own personal space was confined to the right side of the flat, hard old mattress he shared with Jimin back home, tucked into the one empty corner of a small cramped room that was also used as a space to store boxes and clothes. Taehyung's home had proper insulating and 24 hour heating to protect from the cold - whereas Yoongi and Jimin huddled together every night for warmth, and Yoongi let his little brother be the one to sleep closer to the little old radiator they had.

And what had stuck out to him entirely was that no matter the disparity, he still felt he was just as happy, just as content in life, as much as if not more than Taehyung was. It didn't matter that he didn't live in a home like that in a neighborhood like this. Because Yoongi was happy where he was.

And Taehyung, no matter how he appeared, no matter the image he tried so hard to build, always seemed miserable to Yoongi.

It's interesting that he seems to be cultivating the exact life he's known so far, barring the past few years, right here in Seoul. Recreating it and tailoring it to his fancy.

Yoongi walks through the doors of the cafe minutes later, breathing in the cloying scent of expensive coffee. He walks to the counter, orders the coffee the tenant wanted, and sits at one of the tables.

Me: He move?

Jeon Jungkook: Nope. He's still here. Curtains are drawn so I can't check for any movement. Have you reached?

Me: Yeah. I'll call you once I wrap up here.

Yoongi pockets his phone then, leaning back against the plush padded leather chair and sighing, the air flowing out of his lungs in a single smooth motion that leaves his throat feeling prickly and dry.

He's just about to cough when the doors chime, and a woman who looks to be in her early 40s walks in. She looks around the space, eyes squinted, before they zero in on Yoongi.

Yoongi straightens up, smoothing out his posture once she walks over to him.

"Is it you? The one who called?" She asks, to the point. She's wearing relaxed clothing that looks extremely comfortable but is evidently expensive.

"Yes," Yoongi responds, standing up. "You're the tenant, right?…"

She nods hesitantly, tentatively walking over and sitting down quietly in the chair opposite his.

"Where's my coffee?" She asks.

"I've ordered it," Yoongi asks, handing her the receipt so she can confirm it herself. "Thanks for coming. Can I get your name?"

"Show me your face first. This whole situation is extremely weird, so I'm sure you'll understand my concerns."

Yoongi complies, pulling his mask down to reveal his face. In a way, he's glad it's him and not Jungkook doing this. The other boy's bruises are just starting to heal, and she would most likely be wary given her understandable paranoia.

"I'm Min Yoongi. I'm a second year student in biochemistry at KAIST, Daejeon," he introduces, reaching into his wallet and pulling out an identity card. She doesn't take it, but

scrutinizes it from where she sits. Eventually, she nods.

“I thought you were a man around my age over the phone,” she laughs. “You’ve got a really deep voice for a kid.”

Yoongi forces a weak smile.

“I’m Kyung Seoin. I run a pottery studio in this neighborhood.”

“Okay,” Yoongi responds. “Nice to meet you. And thank you once again for coming. I have a few questions I’d like to ask you about your home if that’s alright. I can’t promise I can tell you why I’m asking you these questions, but please answer truthfully and honestly because I do need your help. None of the information I’m seeking can harm you.”

She narrows her eyes, but nods.

“How long have you lived there?”

“I moved in three years ago, back when I opened my business. It’s an old house from the 70s but it’s been renovated enough times to look brand new. It’s the perfect location for me since it’s close to my studio and puts me right in the middle of my target clientele - moms with kids who need extracurriculars to buff up their skillset and college application points. It was an old family home but the owners moved abroad from what I was told. The house was refurbished and split into two apartments for tenancy but each floor is spacious, and I only needed that amount of space for myself. Plus the top floor gave me lovely views. It was perfect.”

“Okay, and when did the tenant on the ground floor move in?”

“Around six months ago?” She asks. “He came with a lot of noise.”

“What do you mean?”

“He’d renovated the whole space,” she responds, suddenly sounding exasperated. “I could hardly sleep amidst the sounds of construction and the smell of paint. And all that for just a single man. And he’s so young too, around your age, what’s he even doing in a place like this? His floor has enough space to comfortably fit a decent sized family.”

“He lives alone?”

“Yeah,” she responds. “Never has any guests either. And he’s home all the time. Never steps out for anything except his classes. Just leaves and comes right back. I know because I asked him. He said he just comes home and studies after…but he looks like a party kid. No way he isn’t with the way he looks, if you ask me. He should be an idol.”

Yoongi nods, recording all of this on his phone for Jungkook to hear later and just in case he misses anything. He’s scratching at the smooth wood of the table, impatient, anxious and apprehensive all at once.

“You’re sure he lives alone?”

“Wait…” Seoin starts. “I thought you had questions about the property? It seems you’re just asking about the guy downstairs.”

“I need to know about his living arrangements, that’s all,” Yoongi answers. “I need to rely on your kindness. I won’t misuse this information.”

“Well…okay. It’s not like I care anyway. He’s making me move out. Yes, he lives alone. I’ve never seen a single other person enter the space. And he’s got like seven locks on the front door, and tons of cameras. He even paid the landlord to change the fence and main gate, and put in the huge tall one that’s there right now. You can’t open it unless you have a remote and can’t see inside or outside, let alone climb out. I tried to open it once when I got back late after a dinner, and this freakishly loud alarm started blaring. Only he could disable it. Almost like some wartime fortress. It made me anxious and when I asked him about it he said that he was paranoid after a home invasion at his previous place."

“What is he like as a neighbour? Any loud noises, bad behaviour?”

“No, not at all,” she responds. “Actually, he’s completely silent. It’s almost like there’s no one there ever. But I know that’s because he got the entire place soundproofed. He’s on the way to getting it done at my place too. He told the landlord last month that he wants my unit too, and he’s offering way more than I can afford. So naturally, I’m getting the boot. I already have people he’s hired to renovate the space come in to scope it out and get measurements for new tiles, soundproofing panels and a bunch of other stuff. Plus he’s planning to break down the drywall that was built to cordon off the internal staircase that was part of the original house, and he’s planning to tear down the external one too. He’s basically planning to make it one big house again, like it used to be. What does a college kid need with so much space? And how is he able to afford any of it? It’s not like he brings girls over or has parties. I’d think he was a serial killer if this were a movie…and he’s so handsome and charming too so whenever I speak to him, no matter how annoyed I get, I can’t seem to really be aggressive enough to tell him off. And I’m not sure I have the grounds to either…considering he hasn’t actually done much to trouble me, and that he’s been a courteous neighbour in every other way. And he *has* won the space fair and square…it’s just annoying because I have to move out. I love living there. Finding another house like that here at that price point and size…is impossible. I’m going to have to move a neighborhood over.”

“Has he said anything about inconveniencing you? Any apology?”

“I haven’t seen him, so no. And I’m moving out Monday evening so it’s looking unlikely. He disabled his doorbell so I can’t talk to him whenever I want, I just have to catch up with him when he’s either on the way in or out. I’m heading to a hotel till I find a place.”

As the barista arrives with her steaming coffee, Yoongi takes a few seconds to think.

A disabled doorbell? Does Taehyung simply never expect visitors? It makes no sense, but also fits perfectly with all of Yoongi’s suspicions. It’s obvious Taehyung is hiding something. While he has no concrete proof beyond knowing about their relationship that Taehyung took Jimin, these facts do nothing but paint his hands red.

“One more thing. I know you said that you haven’t seen any visitors, but have you ever seen this boy in the property or anywhere around?” Yoongi asks, pulling up Jimin’s most recent

picture on his phone. He gives to her, gnawing at his bottom lip.

She squints as she focuses on Jimin's photo, but shakes her head immediately.

"No. I've never seen him before."

"Are you sure?"

"I would've remembered if I did."

Yoongi's shoulders slump.

"I see. Thanks anyway. I hope house hunting goes well for you," Yoongi offers, and although he doesn't mean for it to come across as half-hearted as it does, he's mostly distracted.

Seoin huffs a laugh.

"Are you going to tell me why you needed this information? I hope you're not a criminal."

"I'm not," Yoongi answers. "I'm just suspicious about something he's doing. If you happen to cross paths with him before you move out, please don't mention me or this conversation. I hope I can rely on you a little bit more than I already have."

She scrutinizes him for a second, but then she nods.

"Okay. I suppose I haven't done anything wrong…I haven't given you the password to his house or our gate or anything. Not that I even know the password to his house."

"Exactly. Nothing wrong. Just some info. Non-sensitive info," Yoongi adds, wanting Seoin to rationalize this as a normal exchange rather than something worth sounding an alarm. "Thank

you so much for your help once again."

Yoongi stands, pulling his mask back up to cover his face.

"Are you not having anything?" Seoin asks, stirring some sugars into her coffee.

"I'm afraid not. Have some things to do. You have my number, so please call me if you spot or notice anything strange in your last few days at that address. It would be critical. Anything about any guests of his you see, any sounds, any movements. Things like that."

"Sure. Now I'm starting to think you're a cop. Is he a criminal or something? Do I have to be scared?" Her face is blank but her eyes are telling of her growing paranoia.

"You have nothing to be scared about. He won't hurt you," Yoongi reassures with admirable certainty. To be fair, he is pretty confident about it. If Taehyung wanted to hurt her, he would've already. He's not one for patience. And he hardly cares enough to notice the people around him anyway, much too absorbed in his own life. Kyung Seoin and his other neighbours would be nothing but background noise to him, irrelevant existences that don't matter unless they become a noticeable inconvenience. Which they haven't, *yet*.

"I'm still not going to be able to sleep tonight now," she scoffs. "But I suppose I'll tell you if I notice anything…"

Yoongi offers a weak smile.

"Thanks. Goodbye."

He walks straight out of the cafe, and brisk walks all the way to the taxi that is still parked outside Taehyung's house. All the lights in the house are turned off, but it could also just not be visible through the thick curtains that are drawn. It's deadly quiet in there compared to the otherwise busy street, some kids playing and lots of chatter in the surrounding homes audible.

It’s nightfall now, and Yoongi sees the taxi driver dozing in his seat. Jungkook perks up as soon as he sees him through the windows.

Yoongi gets in, and the driver startles awake. The metre’s still on, and their fare has inched up to over 80,000 won. If Yoongi’s shocked, he doesn’t feel it.

“All done now, sir?” The driver asks.

“Yeah,” Yoongi asks. “Last stop now. Head back to the main city please.”

Jungkook looks at him, his head whipping in surprise. “Hyung, we can take the bus-”

“I’m exhausted. We’re already in the car. It feels stupid to get off here and fish around for a bus stop, only to switch to the subway and then change lines at least three times to make it back. I’m not doing it.”

“But the fare-”

“I’ve saved up. Don’t worry about it, kid. We’ll be back here in the morning anyway. We’ll take the bus then,” Yoongi disregards. “Let’s head home for now.”

Jungkook doesn’t protest too much after that, slumping into his seat.

On the way home, Yoongi plays the conversation back for Jungkook to hear. The other boy listens with wide eyes, focusing. He’s silent till it ends.

“Tomorrow’s a Saturday,” he says. “Which means he won’t have class. He’ll be home all day, if this lady is correct.”

“Yeah. We won’t have an opening until Monday to go in. One of us can head over and keep watch, and the other can do more research. We need to be careful.”

“I’ll keep watch,” Jungkook offers. “I have the next few days off work anyway.”

Yoongi nods.

Monday, he thinks. Just two measly days away.

He can’t wait.

-

Kyung Seoin was right.

Taehyung just spends all his time indoors. He hasn’t moved an inch ever since the previous night. Seoin even messaged Yoongi to let him know. She’s surprisingly eager to help. Jungkook head over to the address at 5 am, and found an inconspicuous spot to keep a watch of the house. It’s a small bench in the corner of the district park, right before a fence that gives him a distant but unobstructed view of Taehyung’s gate.

Meanwhile Yoongi heads to the KU campus to get some information on Taehyung. He’s going to ask around a bit. Nobody stops him or asks for identification at the gates, which surprises him but also doesn’t. He looks like the general college-aged student. And he also supposes that KU isn’t as stringent with these things - known for being more laid back than SNU and KAIST are.

He heads to the large library attached to the medical department, grabs a few books, and sits down at a half occupied table that's next to a large packed one. Wearing a mask and donning an uninspiring outfit of a simple black t-shirt and jeans, Yoongi simply blends into the background. No one spares him a single glance.The library is full of people even for a weekend, everyone desperate to get their hours of studying in. Does Taehyung not need to do the same? Yoongi imagines having his life or the life of someone he loves being in Taehyung's hands. He shudders with disgust.

His phone vibrates.

Jeon Jungkook: Hyung, I know this is bad…but I saw the tenant walking into the house a few minutes ago. I used my phone to zoom in when she was entering the gate code to get inside

Jeon Jungkook: It's 3013

Me: That's great. Keep looking out.

Jeon Jungkook: Thanks. I will

The hours pass in pindrop silence, until the big group in the table next to him stand up and talk about grabbing snacks from the vending machines. Yoongi follows them outside, lingering by the drinks machine while they all swarm around the ones with the chips and energy bars.

All of them moan and groan about upcoming practicals, while others boast about not getting any sleep. It's all mundane conversation until Yoongi finally hears something of value.

“What do you guys have planned for the evening?” One of the guys asks.

A girl whines in response. “I’m gonna do some pre reading for next week. And then I’m gonna curl up in bed and spend the rest of my night scrolling through the forum to catch up on what I’ve missed.”

A forum? Yoongi’s ears perk up.

“Anything new? I haven’t checked in ages!” Another girl asks.

“I saw something about Deoksoo cheating on Geunmi…” A boy says.

A series of scandalized gasps and short shrieks.

“What? No way!”

“I’m not kidding."

“We don’t believe you.”

“Oh, c’mon. Let’s head to the comp lab right now and see it together.”

“Let’s do it. You’re buying us all dinner tonight if you’re wrong.”

“And what if I’m right?”

The group bin their empty drinks and snacks, rushing inside with barely concealed excitement. Yoongi follows from a distance, making his way inward as the group leads him to the back of the library through a series of winding shelves where the computers are.

They all huddle in front of one of them, and Yoongi doesn't care enough to pay too much attention to the specific gossip they're talking about. He himself watches from afar behind one of the shelves.

Another student walks into the aisle Yoongi's standing in, and scoffs, rolling his eyes once he takes in the group's commotion.

"Idiots," he mutters.

"What are they doing?" Yoongi asks, daring. He hopes the other boy doesn't have too many questions about who he is and what he's doing here.

"What they always do. Bullying other people and hiding behind anonymity," he responds, not even looking up as he quickly scans through the shelves for the book he's looking for. "They should ban that forum if I'm being honest. So much for future doctors," he mutters bitterly, finally grabbing his books and walking away.

As if in cue, the group gasp and shriek exasperatedly as they either confirm or deny the news. They're immediately shushed by the other students, and resort to furious whispers as they shuffle out of the library to discuss the news freely.

Yoongi approaches the computer once they've left it, glad to see they haven't logged off the system although they did close the browser window. However all it takes is a quick check of the history for him to take note of the website link.

Yoongi types it into his phone, sends it to Jungkook just in case he loses it somehow, and leaves.

He takes the bus right to Yeonhui-dong. On the way there, he visits the website.

It's one of those standard anonymous gossip forums that almost every university and college department seems to have these days. The one created for Yoongi's university was shut down, but this one still seems to be up and running.

In fact, it's thriving. At least 3 posts a day about people's personal affairs that you'd consider to be crossing the line in every way possible. There's a post exposing someone's father's extramarital affair, and another post about someone getting an abortion. Topics that normal people wouldn't really think to make fun of. The boy from the library was right; so much for future doctors. These people don't seem to have a shred of empathy or compassion.

Yoongi hits the search bar and types in Taehyung's name, then hits enter.

Nothing comes up. There are no posts about him.

So, Yoongi goes to the typing box. It doesn't require any sort of identity submission - no requirement of an email or phone number so whatever he asks or posts can't be traced back to him. There is a rule that says *KU Medical Faculty Only, Don't Share This Platform With Others!!!*, but there's nothing physically stopping him from posting what he wants.

So he does.

Does anyone have anything on Kim Taehyung? What are everyone's thoughts on him?

He posts it. He stares at it for a few seconds, waiting for any sort of interaction. Perhaps a like or comment. But nothing comes. Perhaps it's too soon, and you need to let posts like this marinate so that the bitter students have time to see them and respond.

Around ten minutes pass, but there's nothing. Yoongi frustratedly locks his phone and stuffs it back into his pocket, vowing to check later. People have to respond, right? If Taehyung is anything here like he was in highschool, everyone is going to have a lot to say.

The bus ride passes by uneventfully. Yoongi gets off the vehicle once he reaches the stop, and trudges his way to the park Jungkook is waiting at. He stops at a convenience store and picks up two packaged kimbaps to take with him.

They meet, eat, and spend the rest of the afternoon with their eyes on Taehyung's house. He hasn't left since he got back home the previous evening. Not a peep. No curtains opening, no sounds, no signs of life.

Jungkook's fidgeting, shaking his leg and wringing at his fingers.

"Why won't he just leave? Are you sure we can't just storm in?" He whines.

"He might hurt Jimin. We don't know what we're walking into," Yoongi says. "He's capable of anything when he's angry. And it might complicate things even more. Be patient. Wait for Monday. If we have an opening earlier, we'll take it. We need to confirm he has Jimin in the first place too. We're asking to get arrested if we storm in and he isn't there."

"Where else would he be…" Jungkook mumbles.

"I know," Yoongi answers. There's no other possible place. It's the only solid, unwavering lead they've got. Nothing has burst their bubble yet. But a part of him is scared that this is going to lead to another dead end. Even if Taehyung doesn't have Jimin, which Yoongi genuinely believes is impossible, he would still like to search his house and dig deeper into their relationship. And Taehyung still has to pay for what he did to Jimin. Yoongi just needs to make sure his brother is safe before he moves in and destroys him.

They wait longer. Afternoon turns to evening. Evening turns to night.

Yoongi's phone rings at 8pm.

It’s Seoin.

His nerves surge and he rushes to answer, putting the call on speakerphone so Jungkook can hear the conversation as well.

“Hello?”

“It’s me. Are you in the area?”

“...yes.”

“I had a feeling. I haven’t been able to sleep since we spoke. I keep thinking that he’s a serial killer. Are you sure you can’t tell me what’s up with him? I think I’m going crazy over here…”

“Uh,” Yoongi says.

“

Please. I won’t tell him. I’ll actually help.”

“I’ll tell you after Monday. How’s that?” Yoongi suggests.

“What’s on Monday?”

“You’ll find out after. Just trust me. I need till then to confirm something. Have you noticed anything?”

“No…but I was about to go downstairs and talk to him. His doorbell doesn’t work so I’m going to have to knock. Hopefully he answers. I need to discuss the schedule for the renovation and how it matches with me moving out my boxes…so I thought I’d call you first.

I'm nervous."

"Don't be," Yoongi reassures, now unsure about whether he made a mistake reaching out to her. But he knows it's helped their cause, he just needs to make sure she won't fumble it. "Just be calm. Be like you usually are. He won't do anything."

"Uh…just tell me if he's dangerous."

"If it makes you feel better, keep me on call while you go downstairs. I'm nearby too, so I can jump in and help if he does anything which he won't. You have nothing to worry about. Stay cool. I never said he was dangerous."

"You sure?"

"Yes," Yoongi responds. "Just call me when you're heading down. Don't be nervous. He's just a university student. He's harmless. There's nothing scary about this."

"Okay…I'll head down in five minutes."

"Okay. Call me."

The call ends then.

Yoongi and Jungkook wait, eyes trained on the house. They even move closer so they can get a better look, leaning on the park fence. Yoongi wants to get closer, but the rest of the street leading up to Taehyung's house is just flanked by homes. They would look suspicious if someone observed them just hanging around people's houses, in a neighborhood like this. Yoongi's not sure he wants to take that chance. Plus, they seem to have as good of a view as they can get from over here, considering the abnormally tall fence and gate. And if Seoin has them on call..they'll be able to hear everything too.

She calls mere minutes later, and Yoongi answers in less than a beat.

“Ready?”

“Yeah. I’m heading downstairs. Putting my phone in my pocket.”

“Okay. Stay calm,” Yoongi instructs.

“Yeah. I’ll try.”

A few seconds pass before both he and Jungkook see the door on the first floor open, and Seoin making her way downstairs through the soon-to-be demolished external staircase. Her steps are slow and hesitant, and she disappears out of their view once the tall fence obstructs their view. Both Yoongi and Jungkook slump, instead focusing on their phone.

They hear Seoin knock.

“Taehyung? It’s me, Kyung Seoin from upstairs. I need to talk to you about something. It’s urgent.”

Silence. All she’s met with is silence. You’d think there was nobody living in that house but her.

Seoin knocks and calls out again once a whole minute passes with no response. Yoongi wonders if Taehyung is dead. Why won’t he answer the door?

They wait for a few more minutes, and Seoin is persistent.

Taehyung finally opens the door.

“Miss Kyung…” Yoongi hears Taehyung’s voice, and the hairs on his body rise. The other boy’s voice is raspy, spoken through light pants. “*Is everything alright?”*

“Oh-uh…yes. I wanted to discuss tomorrow’s schedule for the renovators with you-”

“That’s what was urgent?” Taehyung asks, his voice velvety and deep despite how annoyed he seems to be. *“I was in the middle of something. With all due respect, we could’ve discussed this over the phone or through text. You do have my number.”*

Yoongi wishes he could see this conversation as it happens, but he can’t. Taehyung sounds exasperated and frustrated, but he’s keeping his tone calm and to the point. Perhaps Yoongi, owing to the fact that he knows him so well and for so long, is the only one who can really see through the easygoing facade right now.

“O-Oh, are you busy right now?”

“You could say that.”

“I didn’t mean to disturb you. Sorry about that-”

“If you feel like the renovators are arriving too early, I can push the work time to early afternoon at the max. Settling in upstairs is a big priority for me right now and I want the space to be ready as soon as possible. I also understand why it might bother you considering tomorrow is a Sunday. I’ll tell them to come at noon or just past so you can sleep in and enjoy your weekend. It’s the last one you’ll have in this house, isn’t it? Have a good one.”

“T-Thank you, Taehyung-ssi.”

Taehyung clicks his tongue.

“I should be the one thanking you. I’m sorry if it seemed like I was stepping on your toes. I do appreciate how cooperative you’ve been through this process. I know it hasn’t been easy.”

“Haha…not at all.”

“Is there anything else I can help with, Miss Kyung?”

“Uh…” Seoin starts, fumbling. *“I…about-”*

“If it doesn’t immediately come to mind, I’ll trust it isn’t pressing,” Taehyung interjects. *“When it comes back to you, you can just text me. Please don’t bother me or knock on the door. It scares…my pet.”*

Jungkook raises his eyebrows.

“Pet?”

“Yes, my pet,” Taehyung responds flatly.

“I didn’t know you had a pet,” Seoin laughs awkwardly.

“Well, I do. Adorable, but not very good with strangers. Loud and unfamiliar noises scare it, so I’m hoping you won’t repeat this. Once again, with all due respect. I am available over message if and when you need me. I’ll be happy to respond as soon as I’m able to.”

“Oh, I-”

“Goodbye, Miss Kyung. I’ll make sure to say bye once more in person before you move out.”

They hear the door close over the phone, and then hear the sounds of Seoin heading back up the stairs to her floor. They see her too, once she emerges over the parapet of the fence, bounding her way up, slinking through her front door and pressing it shut behind her.

Yoongi and Jungkook hear rustling as she removes her phone from her pocket.

"Hello? Did you hear any of that?"

"All of it. You did great. That wasn't so bad, was it?"

"What do we do now?"

"Nothing. You just carry on till Monday, that's all," Yoongi responds, feeling like they've involved her enough for now, for this stage of things.

"Okay," she says. *"I think I caught him in the middle of something."*

"What do you mean?"

"He was sweating, and his hair was mussed. His shirt was on inside out and his eyes were all glazed out too, face flushed."

"I see," Yoongi says. That could mean anything.

"Where are you right now?"

"Nearby. There's really no reason to be nervous."

"Okay…if you say so. I'll keep an eye out for the rest of the night if you want me to."

“That would be great. Thanks, Noona.”

"*...sure.”*

The call ends.

“Maybe he was exercising or lugging around furniture,” Jungkook offers…but it’s unconvincing to both of them. Neither of them want to think about why Taehyung would be messily dressed and sweaty in a house he supposedly lives in alone, even moreso with the thought of Jimin being in there.

“Yeah, maybe.”

“And what he said about having a pet…” Jungkooks starts. “You don’t think he meant…”

“It doesn’t matter.”

Yoongi fiddles around with his phone then, and he does his usual check of Taehyung’s socials to see if he’s posted anything new. There isn’t anything new.

And then, he remembers the forum.

He rushes to open up the website once more, scrolling down to find his post.

Yoongi’s eyes widen. There are plenty of comments.

Biggest dick on the campus (metaphorically and literally, can confirm) ***(+60, -2)***

He's a hot nepo kid who's going to graduate with subpar grades and still make more than all of us combined. Next ***(+43, -5)***

- *That's rude. He's a good student* ***(-5, +1)***

- *Not good enough to get in the way we did though. Wasn't he super close to repeating the year? I know he bounced back and everything but I remember that phase last year where he just failed everything. It wasn't till about 2 months ago that he started scoring well again* ***(+16, -2)***

- *No matter what you say, he has the skill. No one does better than him in our practicals, and his grades (now at least) are great for someone who never joins study group sessions or reviews. There's something scary in the way he works though ngl, wouldn't want to be in the same room with him and a scalpel for sure* ***(+30)***

I've never spoken to him. But I know that he was kicked off his swim team for fucking up majorly last year. He's back now and captain again like nothing happened ***(+12)***

- *He's a fucking asshole tyrant. My buddy's in the team and said he's a nightmare captain. Bastard acts like he didn't cost us that major win at SNU last Spring* ***(+5)***
- *Must've bought his way back into the team lolololol Anyway let's see how he does on Monday, they're going all the way to Yeongsan this time*

He's hot that's all I know and that's all I care about ***(+45, -9)***

My friend in the art department slept with him…said he's worth the hype ***(+20, -1)***

- *He hasn't hooked up with anyone in a while though??? I haven't heard anything in ages* ***(+35)***

- He must've run through all the hot girls in our university, probably looking elsewhere ***(+5, -2)***

- My theory is that he has a girlfriend. He's stopped showing up to parties and all the usual clubs too. Just comes to class and dips right after in his fancy car ***(+39)***

- I agree with this theory. Eunae tried to make a move on him a month ago and he just brushed her off. They've definitely fucked before and he looked at her like he wouldn't even consider it. It was so embarrassing for her lmao

- Be fr. I heard a junior was about to hook up with him recently and he couldn't get it up

- I slept with him in our first year, NOT TRUE!!!

- Gurl you're being pathetic rn ***(+5)***

- What's pathetic is you spreading lies about him!!!

It's a mess. But it's obvious that people have a lot to say about him.

So Taehyung had a phase last year where he'd fucked up majorly both academically and through his extracurriculars. Last spring…that would be around right after when he and Jimin would've broken up.

So the breakup did affect Taehyung pretty severely. It's hard to imagine, if Yoongi's being honest; the mere idea of Taehyung being so hung up on someone that it affects his drive.

And there's also the part where Taehyung hasn't hooked up with anyone in a while. No more parties either. Taehyung also only started doing better at school two months ago, which is when Jimin was taken.

It all fits.

Yoongi receives a message, and his heart stops. It's for the group chat.

Kim Taehyung: Does everyone want to come over to my place for drinks tomorrow? All on me.

What?

No way. No way. Yoongi's heart drops. Is this real?

Sunwoo: Your place????

Kim Taehyung: Yup 😀

Dohwan: Am I dreaming?

Yoseop: So in!!!

Hanwon: Fuck yeah!

This doesn't make any sense. Taehyung hasn't ever let anyone enter his new house. He's extremely secretive about it, and has obsessed about keeping it locked down and inaccessible for both entry and exit.

And now, a party?

Why now? What prompted this?

It pokes at Yoongi's anxiety in a way that deafens him and makes him want to throw up all at once.

What if he's wrong? What if he's been wrong all this while?

What if it's not Taehyung and he's been wasting these past few days on a wrong, dead end?

What if Taehyung *knows*?

What if he knows that they know.

Kim Taehyung: I would love it if everyone on this group could make it 🥺

It feels pointed. Right at him.

Yoongi's going to throw up. He isn't scared of Taehyung and what he might do, but he's scared about what that might mean for Jimin. Does this mean Jimin isn't at his house? Not anymore? Or was he never there in the first place?

"Hyung? What's wrong?" Jungkook asks, nudging him.

Yoongi just hands him the phone. Jungkook takes it, scrolling through the messages. His eyes widen and he frowns.

"What? His house? *This* house?"

"Yeah," Yoongi responds. "Fuck. What the fuck is he doing?"

"You have to go, hyung," Jungkook says suddenly, his head snapping up. "This is a crazy opening."

"He definitely knows. He knows that we know. Hyungsoo must've snitched-" Yoongi seethes, the panic setting in. He can feel his mouth hanging open, the roof of it tender and cold, anxious pants coming out hot and heavy. "We weren't careful enough-"

"We don't know that. This could just be another show of his to taunt you."

Jungkook is right. They don't know. Not for sure anyway. And he wouldn't put it past Taehyung.

But it's too uncanny, and the timing is eerie.

“I don’t think Hyungsoo would tell,” Jungkook adds. “It seemed like he hadn’t spoken to Taehyung in ages. A-And he knows that we’d call the police on him if he snitched and tipped him off. Don’t assume the worst.”

Yoongi doesn’t respond. All he can think about is how reckless they’ve been. What if Taehyung can see them right now, or recognized them through one of his many cameras? They’ve covered their faces, but still. And whether the consequence of all of it is Jimin’s safety being jeopardized. He doesn’t want to assume the worst…but…

“Hyung, you have to go. Say yes,” Jungkook insists. “Don’t panic unless we have the reason to. I also don’t think it’s an ambush or anything considering he’s invited your whole group. It’s a priceless opportunity to see what the house looks like on the inside, and look for clues. Especially if we plan to break in on Monday, knowing the interior layout would make the biggest difference.”

“Yeah. Yeah, you’re right,” Yoongi says.

“We have to be vigilant. I’ll hang around the area, perhaps right here while you’re in there. To help…if it’s required. It’s tomorrow, right? Won’t the tenant be there too? She moves out Monday evening right?”

“Yes.”

“So we have support on the inside. I think this is just him showing off and pushing it even further. He’s having fun with you. Just like he has every time you’ve met him so far. That’s my bet,” Jungkook says. “We have to roll with the punches.”

Jungkook is right. Yoongi’s just terrified of what he’s going to find.

“Yeah.”

Chapter End Notes

a PARTY, hmm??????????????????????????

And that's the 15th chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 19: No Going Back

Chapter Notes

> Here's the nineteenth chapter!!! Thank you so much for reading. Posting it early because I'll be out of town and away from my laptop tomorrow onwards...
>
> Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!
>
> I hope you enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday evening comes faster than Yoongi can blink.

He’s around the area, deep in one of the bylanes of Yeonhui-dong with Jungkook. He doesn’t want to be the first to head to Taehyung’s house, and is waiting for at least a few of the guys to announce they’ve arrived before he finally makes his way there. He’s already received some messages from Seoin about seeing a few people come in.

“Stay calm, and cool. Treat him the way you usually do,” Jungkook advises.

“With indifference?” Yoongi huffs.

“Sure, as long as it’s not out of the ordinary from what he knows and expects from you.”

Yoongi just doesn’t know how he’s going to hold back from killing Taehyung as soon as he lays eyes on him. It’s been comparatively easier all this while, considering he’s only observed Taehyung from afar. But if they’re going to be face to face, and most likely have some semblance of a conversation, Yoongi isn’t sure how he’s going to keep his cool and not act knowing what he does now.

He isn’t sure if he’ll be able to pull this off, but he has to. It’s a chilly night tonight, and the freezing currents of wind bite at his nose. He's wearing a thick hoodie but the shivers still wrack their way up his spine every few minutes.

Eventually, his phone vibrates.

Sunwoo: Yoongi!!! Where are you?

Sunwoo: Everyone’s already here. Taehyung says we won’t start drinking till you’re here and we’re all together

Yoongi clenches his teeth.

Me: On the way. I’ll be there in 5

“I’m gonna head over. They’re asking where I am,” Yoongi reveals flatly. “See you.”

Jungkook nods. He’s got his hands buried deep into the pockets of his jackets, the shells of his ears bright red from the cold. If he was Jimin, Yoongi would’ve pulled his beanie down to cover them and keep them warm.

“Good luck,” he says reassuringly. “Remember that I’m right here. If you need anything.

“Yeah.”

Yoongi walks with purpose then. He can’t tell whether he’s dreading it or desperate for it; to be put out of his misery. To find out the truth about yet another thing he’s been building up in his head.

Taehyung’s gate is open this time. Just a crack. Probably left open so his guests can come in at their pace.

Yoongi walks in, pace slow and hesitant. He’s immediately confronted with the large driveway and garden. It’s a bit barren, just a poorly looked after dying lawn with patches of brown. It is neatly trimmed though. You could tell that it has the potential to be beautiful, had it been a family living here; there’s enough room for a swing, a barbecue set up, outdoor seating or even a gazebo. Peeking into the rear part of the outdoor space, Yoongi sees a pool behind the house. Perfect for Taehyung’s swimming habit.

What he also sees is the barrage of cameras up close now, covering every inch of the compound and the street outside. They follow him as he explores the garden, obviously capable of motion detection. The fence and gate are about 2.5 times his height, and he can’t see outside into the street anymore. It almost looks like a prison compound, and he understands what Seoin was talking about now. He can see the staircase leading up to her apartment.

The front door itself is tall and massive. There’s an expensive looking keypad. He tries the doorbell, and it works this time.

It takes about 20 seconds for Taehyung to open the door.

The moment it’s open, Yoongi’s hit with the amount of sound. Someone’s playing music inside and the chatter is unbelievably loud, testifying to the intense soundproofing Seoin was

talking about. He couldn't hear a smidge of this while he was waiting outside. You'd think the house was empty.

And then, Taehyung. He stands tall, a casual black tee sitting on his wide frame. He looks at Yoongi, and he smiles.

Yoongi stares back, something crawling up his throat. His head starts to splinter with an ache, and his vision hazes up.

"Hey, Yoongi. You're late, but it's great to see you," Taehyung greets with a grin, his eyes curving up.

Yoongi's fists clench. There's a buzzing under his skin, and his fingers twitch, itching to punch the smile off Taehyung's face. It's a near overwhelming urge.

"You good?" Taehyung asks then, smiling dropping just the slightest. "Look, I know we haven't always gotten along that great. I hope we can put it all behind us. We've known each other for ages. I do want to be friends. I'm sure you've learned a lot from me too."

Yoongi just stares back, unable to comprehend the gall of him. All he wants is to gouge his eyes out.

He remembers Jungkook's words.

Stay calm, and cool.

"Sure," Yoongi says.

"Great," Taehyung grins. "I know you've been having a rough go of it."

“Yeah. I have. Things have been really hard,” Yoongi offers, finally falling into the role he’s trying to play.

“I can tell. Especially with your brother. A real tragedy, isn’t it? I haven’t found many leads myself but I have forwarded the digital poster to my friends just in case someone recognizes him.”

Yoongi’s eye twitches.

“Thanks, Taehyung. You’ve got a nice place here.”

“Ah, yes, I do,” Taehyung grins, rubbing the back of his neck. “Come on in. We can get this evening started too.”

Yoongi follows him inside, and lets his eyes trail over every inch of the space as he sees it. It all looks freshly done up. New, polished tiles in the foyer, glossy stained hardwood spanning the rest of the floor. The walls are painted a classic eggshell white, and the space is wide and airy.

Everyone cheers as they see Yoongi, shouting for him to come sit, but he’s still busy looking around. His eyes are greedy and he’s desperate for it, to find something that sticks out to him in an odd way.

The house, or even just this ground floor, is enough for a family of 4-5. Just like Seoin said. Yoongi can see several doors from the living room he’s in right now, and is sure there’s more down the corridor. The lights aren’t on so he can’t quite make out just yet. The kitchen looks massive, and there’s even a bar counter.

They’re all mostly used to huddling around Sunwoo’s tiny plastic table in his equally tiny studio back in the main city, but here, there’s no shortage of space. There’s around 15 of them, and they’re all comfortably circled around a large expensive teak wood circular table. The surface is littered with not just their usual soju and chips, but also expensive-looking bottles of Japanese whiskey and some food that’s obviously been ordered in. There are comfy

floor cushions for them all to sit on, surrounded by a plush sofa set. There's a massive TV in front of them too, and it looks like it belongs in an elaborate home theatre setup.

Yoongi is in awe. He's yanked down to sit, sandwiched between Dohwan and Hajoon, and he's interrogated about why he's late. But all Yoongi can think about is that there doesn't seem to be any sign of Jimin here.

It just looks like Taehyung's house. Very similar to his house back in their hometown too. To be fair, he does know that if Jimin were here, Taehyung would be careful to erase every possible sign of him before pulling a stunt like this.

"Sorry, my bus got stuck in traffic," Yoongi offers half-heartedly, and everyone seems so desperate to start drinking that they don't care enough to question it. Sunwoo eagerly pours everyone their shots of whiskey, some of it even spilling onto the table in his excitement.

And then they drink, even Yoongi. Taehyung sits across from him, rubbing shoulders with the other guys.

"Finally," Sunwoo exhales after he downs the shot, laughing breathily. "Wow. I haven't ever had whiskey this good."

The others agree audibly.

"It's so-so," Taehyung responds.

"Why haven't you called us over all this time, Tae?" someone demands. Yoongi can't quite remember his name, but he remembers his blunt nose. "This place is sick!"

"That's a good question. Why did I finally call you guys over?" Taehyung mulls out loud in an upward tune, and his eyes meet Yoongi's for a second. Yoongi's stomach twists and he shifts his eyes to the wall, searching the space once again. He has to play it cool.

“Jinsoo wouldn’t stop fucking blowing my phone up until I did,” Taehyung reveals then, laughing. “He told me he was planning to move, and I gave him my real estate broker’s contact details. That bastard spilled the beans about my place, and Jinsoo wouldn’t rest till I agreed to invite him over. Then, I started to think about hosting everyone the way Sunwoo has so far. It wasn’t such a bad idea…especially since we have old friends like Min Yoongi here with us. So I did.”

“So you guys can all thank me,” Jinsoo goads.

Yoongi sags just the slightest. If it really is for that reason…then they’re in the clear.

“Now that we’ve had our first drink,” Kihoon announces. “I demand a house tour. This place is too damn cool.”

Everyone else cheers, and Taehyung laughs.

“Sure,” he agrees, standing up. Everyone else follows, even Yoongi, who lingers at the back of the crowd. But also close enough that he has a clear view of everything. His heart thunders.

When Yoongi walks through the centre of the living room as Taehyung leads them to the kitchen, the floor creaks rather loudly. He frowns at the fancy rug he’s standing on, but looks up once he hears Taehyung speak. Seoin did say that this is an old house.

“This is the kitchen,” Taehyung explains, and everyone gawks at his expensive double-door fridge, stove, microwave oven and dishwasher. The counters are all posh marble, and the cabinets look like they cost a pretty penny too. “Don’t really use it all that often. I don’t do too much cooking beyond my protein shake, maybe some chicken breast, eggs and ramyeon.”

Nothing worth noting in the kitchen. It’s barren and devoid of life, so much unlike Jimin and Jungkook’s tiny one that’s spilling with hanging plants, spices and pastes, pots and pans.

Taehyung then takes them to the first bedroom, which he's made into a home gym and a personal study. Nothing here either, just an exercise bench, some dumbbells and other equipment. Plus a basic desk and a bookshelf full of his med-school books. The guys seem thrilled to see it all though.

Then, Taehyung leads them to the master bedroom down the long hall. It's huge as expected, with an attached ensuite bathroom and a walk-in closet. There's a computer table too. Again, with only signs of Taehyung.

Yoongi's starting to feel restless. He's starting to feel sick.

"What's in that room?" Dohwan asks once they're back in the living room, pointing at the one door Taehyung didn't take them through. "And I'm just going to ask - why the fuck did you move all the way to Yeonhui? I mean, no disrespect, this house is fucking awesome - but it took all of us more than an hour to get here. This place is so far away from KU. How are you doing the commute? And why do you need three fucking bedrooms?"

"Oh, that's…the room that's getting some work done. So the thing is that my cousin sister is also coming down to Seoul for university. My parents asked me to find a house that we both could live in together so I can keep an eye on her and be there for her, you know? That room is going to be her room. Her parents are really paranoid about her safety….which is why the security is the way it is. There's a hotel management school not too far from here surprisingly, she's enrolling there to be a pastry chef."

Yoongi's face drains as he hears the news. His skin prickles.

Although shoddy, it is plausible to a certain degree.

Taehyung could just be lying…but if it's the truth….it would confirm that Jimin isn't here. Which is not objectively a bad thing…but it would also mean that they've truly exhausted all of their leads.

Yoongi's not sure if he can stomach that.

The night starts then. Everyone drinks, truly helping themselves to the seemingly endless supply of Taehyung's liquor and spirits collection. People continue to moan and groan about failed relationships, exams and part-time jobs.

"So, Taehyung," Yoseop starts. "The last time we all met at that fried chicken joint, you said you were seeing someone. How's that going?"

Yoongi frowns at his empty glass, listening.

"Pretty well," Taehyung smiles. "I'm the happiest I've ever been. I kinda feel like I have the life I've always wanted, y'know?"

"I always took you for a commitment phobe," Sunwoo cackles.

"When you find the right person…" Taehyung trails off…laughing. His cheeks flush red just the slightest.

"What's her name? Show us a picture-"

"Hold on, did you guys hear about Haein? Lee Haein?" The guy with the blunt nose shrieks then, loud enough that he successfully steals everyone's attention.

"Who?" Taehyung frowns, setting his drink down.

"Lee Haein! From back home. She was president of class B! Does anyone remember her? Really pretty, super long hair."

Yoongi remembers. He remembers immediately. Lee Haein. She was in the last video he'd come across of Taehyung's before he'd left that disgusting group they kept adding him to. Taehyung had filmed himself having sex with her. Yoongi didn't have to watch it to know that that was what it was.

But he's not going to volunteer this information just yet. A look at Taehyung's face has Yoongi realize that the other man has no idea who this girl is. He doesn't remember her.

"You mean the girl with those orthodox parents? The high scorer?" Sunwoo asks.

"Yeah!"

"Oh, I remember her. She was quite nice. Pretty introverted though," Sunwoo offers, taking a sip of his drink.

"What about her?" Taehyung asks, seeming bored but curious on the surface. Half his attention is on his phone that he's fiddling with.

"She's dead," the other man announces, and his loud words draw the attention of everyone in the room. "Apparently, she killed herself a year ago."

Even Yoongi stills then. That's really sad news.

"Quit playing," someone laughs.

"I'm not! It's true!" He insists. "I heard from some friends. And then I confirmed it with our old teachers when I visited home last month."

"What the fuck happened?" Dohwan demands.

Everyone's words are already slurring. It's going to be a long night.

"Apparently…she had sex with someone in our senior year…and got pregnant," the guy reveals, eliciting a few gasps. "She wanted to keep the baby but her parents kicked her out… because no sex before marriage, right? The church threatened to blacklist their family or something. So I heard she struggled by herself with odd jobs, lived in a shelter for a while, and had a miscarriage at some point due to an accident at work. So it was all for nothing. She lost both the baby and her family. She'd just been floating around working at some factory and someone found her dead last year at her work accommodation. I don't know how, but it's confirmed that she killed herself."

Yoongi's going to throw up. His eyes aren't the only ones that drift to Taehyung. It seems that more than a few of them remember Taehyung bragging about taking Haein's virginity back then. She dropped out of school not too long after then.

But Taehyung's expression is void of recognition. He really, genuinely doesn't remember her. He can't recollect the person whose life he ruined, and ultimately killed. Yoongi wonders how many lives he's destroyed without even caring or realizing it. Would he even care that Haein was pregnant with his child?

"That's fucking horrifying," Sunwoo responds. He genuinely seems upset. "I always thought she had a bright future. She was so smart…the kind who would make a good lawyer or doctor."

"I know, right? She ended up slaving in some factory production line because her family abandoned her. She'd flunked her CSATs too so college was a no-go. Her whole life went downhill after her pregnancy."

"And the father?"

"I dunno who he was. He never took responsibility though, evidently."

"See, this is why I never let my sister have any male friends!" Someone else argues drunkenly.

Taehyung continues to scroll through his phone absentmindedly. He might have even stopped listening.

Yoongi's starting to feel sick now. Really sick. This is the person who dated Jimin for years. Who hurt him and cheated on him. That poor girl. Poor Haein. It could've been his Jiminie. Why didn't he do anything back then? He knew…but…why was he a bystander? He finds himself asking this question, he never has before. If he'd said something to her, or exposed Taehyung for what he was, she would probably still be alive today, living her very bright future. He could've saved countless girls from this mental torment, and the horrible crime of being filmed without their consent. Back then, he just thought that Taehyung would eventually get what was coming to him. That he'd let fate handle it, and he was busy enough to be able to sequester it to the back of his mind considering he was so busy. Yoongi's silence, something which he never thought about much, now has had deadly consequences. The guilt threatens to consume him alive. He doesn't know Haein at all, but the grief is suffocating. Why was he complacent?

If he'd said something back then, stood up for those girls, Jimin would likely have never had to go through any of what he has. He would've been able to live out a peaceful childhood too, truly enjoy his youth like everyone else his age. He wouldn't have been beaten, violated, kidnapped, and also filmed. Yoongi feels like he's to blame for this. Moreso than he has before. Jimin is paying for his complacency.

This house is the only plausible place Jimin could be in…and he isn't here. Unless he's in the locked room. But…it just feels like a stretch. Taehyung wasn't jumpy when he saw some of the guys fiddling around with the door handle. If Jimin isn't here, where is he? There's not a shred of evidence that might suggest he was ever in this house. He might just not be here any longer.

And that terrifies Yoongi.

What if Taehyung killed him? What if Jimin isn't alive anymore?

The intrusive thoughts start to cloud his mind. Yoongi has to dig his nails into his thighs to keep his eyes from stinging with furious tears. If it's true, that would explain why Taehyung has so casually and confidently called Yoongi over. Because there's no evidence, nothing for

him to worry about. Not anymore. It would just be a game now, for him. A way to entertain himself.

Yoongi's train of thought is cut short once the sound of a glass shattering echoes through the space. He looks up.

Yoseop seems to have dropped his drink, obviously holding it while walking around the space and interacting with everyone. Most of the group is past the point of being drunk. His hiball glass has shattered over the hardwood floor, and the amber liquid inside is quick to stain the one fancy rug in the centre of the room.

"Fuck, Tae, I'm so sorry-" Yoseop starts, scrambling to the floor to pick up the shards of glass.

He moves to lift up the edge of the rug before he's stopped rather violently by a rough hand on his arm, Taehyung yanking him away from it. The rug drops back to the floor.

"Don't worry about it," Taehyung reassures with a smile that seems extremely fake. His eyes have sharpened now, and Yoongi can tell he's angry.

"Let me clean it up-"

"I said, *don't worry about it*," Taehyung repeats, harder this time, still holding Yoseop's arm in a rough, steely grip. Yoongi wonders why he's reacting so severely. "Leave the rug alone. I'll…get it professionally cleaned later. It was due for a refresh anyway. Why don't you head to the washroom and rinse out your sweater? Some of the whiskey has splashed onto your clothes."

Yoseop stares up at him, cowering slightly. The energy in the room has dimmed sharply, almost everyone unsettled by at Taehyung's bizzare and split-second change in mood.

Eventually, Yoseop nods. "S-Sure."

Taehyung flexes his grip on Yoseop's arm before he lets go, watching as Yoseop scrambles to the guest bathroom. Everyone is silent and the air is stilted, thrown off by Taehyung's harsh reaction. Not too many of them have seen him this way, barring Yoongi.

"Sorry, guys," Taehyung apologizes then, his eyes curving up in a more natural smile this time around. He must be able to identify the apprehensive atmosphere. "I was just worried he'd hurt himself. Some of the glass shards are embedded into the rug. So everyone, please don't touch the rug. Stay away from it. I don't want anyone getting hurt."

The switch in persona is horrifying. It makes him seem insane, which he is.

Where the fuck is Jimin?

What has Taehyung done to him? Why isn't he here?

They're the only thoughts Yoongi has. His eyes inexplicably get pulled to the stained rug, and the whiskey splotches turn blood red in his mind. Splattered and soaked with it. He can almost smell the irony tang to it.

Yoongi feels the bile rise up his throat. He stands up shakily, slapping a hand over his mouth.

"Yoongi? You okay?" Taehyung demands.

Yoongi hardly manages to hold it in, his eyes starting to spill with tears, although they're mostly obscured by his hand.

"Fuck, the other bathroom's occupied-" Taehyung curses. "Use mine."

Taehyung leads him to the master bedroom hurriedly, guiding him to the ensuite bathroom. He turns on the lights for him and opens the door, gesturing for him to enter.

“I guess you had too much to drink,” Taehyung says then, and his concern feels so ingenuine that it makes Yoongi feel sicker. It’s crazy how different he seems when it’s just the two of them, everyone else still outside in the living room. His personality flips like a switch. His eyes are soft with feigned worry but they’re also hard at the same time. “Go ahead. Use the washroom and come out when you’re feeling better. It’ll all be okay soon.”

Yoongi barely manages to turn around before he falls forward and throws up in the toilet. His oesophagus aches as it’s wrung tight, squeezing out every bit of his energy.

He hears Taehyung laugh quietly, turn around, and leave.

Yoongi spends ages there. Once he’s done throwing up, he starts to cry. He feels defeated. Jimin isn’t here. Where is he? Where the fuck is he?”

Yoongi sits down on the floor and leans back against the wall of the bathtub, panting. Jimin can’t be dead…he can’t be…

His eyes drift over the space and into the glass shower room. They hazily zero in on something before alarm bells start to ring in Yoongi’s head.

In the drain, are a few hairs.

Yoongi stands up shakily, and opens the glass door, crouching down to get a better look. The floor of the shower room is still wet, meaning that someone bathed here a short while ago.

In the drain, is a mix of hairs. Some are long and straight, black. Easily identifiable as Taehyung’s.

And the others…they're lilac for most of the strand and then black at the roots. Yoongi picks one of them up, scrutinizing it. He also makes sure to shut and lock the bathroom door before he does.

His eyes widen.

This…is Jimin's hair. He had lilac hair when he was taken, and since it's 2 months later now, his natural hair would've started to grow in. Taehyung doesn't have lilac hair. It's a rare enough dye for it to have to be Jimin's, especially given what they know. The length of the strand is even consistent with how long Jimin's hair would be right now.

Yoongi's in biology research. He's scrutinized all kinds of samples. This is a new strand of hair. It's just fallen only recently. Could even be less than a few hours old…

He tests the bend of it, rushing to pat it dry first with the fabric of his hoodie. Sure enough, it bends but has just enough firmness for it to be extremely fresh. Obscure knowledge from school Yoongi didn't think he'd ever have to put into practice.

Yoongi starts to laugh then. He looks up at the shower caddy and sees two body washes; one a traditional macho one and another fruity berry one. The same fragrance and brand Jimin's stuck with for years. Yoongi laughs harder.

Jimin *is* here. He has to be. Somewhere in this fucking house. Somewhere he hasn't seen before, or somewhere he hasn't checked just yet. Somewhere.

Yoongi knows for sure now.

He's confirmed it, in the most stupid, unpredictable way. Yoongi picks out and grabs all of the lilac hairs and stuffs them in his pocket, not wanting Taehyung to wonder what he was doing in here for so long and realize he'd seen Jimin's hair in the drain.

Me: He's in here. I know he is. Somewhere here

Me: We're moving in tomorrow

Jeon Jungkook: What, really? How?

Me: His hair's in the shower drain. Recent

Jeon Jungkook is typing…

Yoongi pockets his phone, cleans up after himself, and leaves the bathroom. He looks around the master bedroom and doesn't find any clues. Taehyung must've been careful enough to clean everything up. He supposes that in a house as big as this, something as insignificant as a bathroom drain would've gone unremembered.

He tries to look haggard as he makes his way back to the group, because he's sure everyone is under the impression that he'd left to throw up. Which is also true, but he's somehow feeling revitalized. Definitely better than he has all evening.

"Tae…let me stay over. I'm too drunk to make it back home," someone's whining by the time he gets back.

"No one is staying over," Taehyung says plainly. "I'll get you all taxis, but everyone has to go home."

"C'mon…" Sunwoo whines, egging him on. "You've got all this space for just you…share."

"I need my privacy. You might not be too happy with what you see if you stay." Taehyung smiles as he says it, and then notices that Yoongi's returned. His posture perks up.

“Yoongi, are you feeling better?” He asks, eyes light and already glinting. A few others look in his direction, echoing the question.

“Yeah…I think I had too much to drink. But I got it all out of my system now,” Yoongi answers plainly, sitting back down around the table.

“Attaboy,” Sunwoo cheers, crawling over the floor towards him and reaching out to ruffle his hair once he’s finally close enough. Yoongi gives him a brief smile, the only one that’s genuine.

Taehyung’s still staring at Yoongi. He has a half-smile that’s caught on his face, as if suspended in place. His eyes are scrutinizing him, and for the first time, Yoongi doesn’t feel nervous. He just holds his gaze, staring right back.

It’s fucking Kim Taehyung. The biggest moron on the planet. As if Yoongi’s going to back down.

“Glad you’re feeling better…Yoongi,” Taehyung eventually says, before picking up his glass. “My next drink is dedicated to you. Whoever would like to drink in Yoongi’s honour can join in. A final toast before I kick all of you out for tonight.”

Yoongi huffs a laugh.

Surprisingly, everyone joins except for the ones who are passed out and strewn across the floor in several different parts of the house barring the area around the stained rug.

“To Yoongi,” Taehyung declares. “May you find everything it is you’re looking for.”

Everyone cheers.

Yoongi's all smiles.

-

Taehyung's a little late in leaving on Monday morning.

Yoongi and Jungkook know, because they're ready and waiting at 5 am, in their usual spot at the park. They watch as the sun rises, and how the curtains still stay tightly drawn. Taehyung usually leaves at around 7:30 am to make it to class on time.

However, 7:30 am passes, and so does 8 am.

"Is he hungover? Did he drink a lot last night?" Jungkook asks, rubbing his hands together. It's freezing.

"I don't think so," Yoongi responds. "He was fine. But to be fair, he guzzles alcohol like water. It's a real wonder his liver's held on so long."

Jungkook huffs a laugh.

"Either way, we're going to have to be quick. There are seven locks on his front door, and they all need different passcodes. So…we're going to have to break the door down. Which means-"

"An alarm is going to ring, and he's going to find out," Jungkook completes.

"Exactly. So we need to be really really quick. Go in, ransack the place, find Jimin, get out."

"Should we tell the tenant?"

“I…don’t know,” Yoongi answers, trying to gauge how he feels about it. “Let’s not. For now.”

She already seems like the paranoid type. If she knew they were planning to break in, she might not take it too kindly and might alert the police. That’s the last thing they need at this stage.

Jungkook nods.

It’s so cold that their lips feel like they’re turning blue.

Another 30 minutes pass, and there’s no sign of Taehyung leaving the house. They’re both getting restless, and Yoongi tries not to grow anxious about what this could mean.

“Do you think he has a different schedule today, or?” Jungkook asks, now stuffing his hands into his pockets. Yoongi thinks about how they should’ve brought hot packs with them. His backpack is full anyway. He’s packed a crowbar, pepper spray, a knife, some rope and tape. What he’s also packed is a small blanket for Jimin, and a change of clothes for him too. Plus some basic first aid.

“Wait…wait,” Yoongi says the moment he realizes it. “I think I read on the forum that he has a match today. Swimming.”

“What time’s that?”

“No idea. Obviously not right now. We just have to wait. He has to leave for it anyway. This is good, he’s going to be occupied for a longer time. He won’t be checking his phone for security updates when he’s in the pool.”

Jungkook nods.

Taehyung only ends up leaving at 10 am. They can't see *him*, but they do see the gate opening and his big black car speeding out, uncaring of the fact that it's a residential area.

Yoongi and Jungkook wait 35 minutes just to make sure he's gone for good, and is far enough away. And then, they move in. They jog over to the house from the park, trying not to go too fast and alarm any of the residents. Yoongi's heart is hammering in his chest.

The moment they come to a stop in front of the gate, Yoongi keeps a watch of the street around them as Jungkook inputs the code. The other boy is worrying his lip between his teeth, although he's firm and quick in getting them in.

Both of them jump the moment the gate starts to open, the automatic mechanism louder than they'd thought it would be. They slink in as soon as the gap is wide enough to fit them, and Jungkook hits the button on the inside to close it back up.

Yoongi's the first to dash toward the front door, warily eyeing the cameras that are definitely capturing their movements. He has his mask on, but he's sure Taehyung would recognize him anyway.

He crouches onto the floor and opens his backpack, taking out the crowbar-

"Uh, h-hyung?" Jungkook asks.

"What?" Yoongi asks absentmindedly, taking out the tool.

"The tenant upstairs…she saw me just now. She must've heard the gate-"

Just then, the two of them hear the door opening upstairs.

“Hey! You! I’m calling the cops!” She shrieks. “Get out of here!”

Yoongi curses and darts out of the enclosed patio, coming into her view so she can see him. He yanks his mask down.

“Calm down. It’s me.”

Her panicked face contorts into one of confusion.

“Min Yoongi? What are you doing? Are you breaking in?” She demands, words flying out at a mile a minute. She’s got her phone in her hands, probably ready to call the police.

“Yeah. I am,” he says, handing the crowbar to Jungkook so he can get to work on the door. The other boy takes it readily, getting to work.

“W-Why?” She asks. He can see the panic turn to suspicion in her eyes. “Have you been tricking me all along?”

“No, I haven’t. Please don’t call the police…you can trust me. Remember the picture of the boy I showed you when we met at the cafe? He’s my little brother. I think Taehyung kidnapped him and is holding him here. I’m just going to search for him.”

“Kidnapped?” She exclaims, but she’s lowering her phone now, which is a good sign. “Who’s he?” She asks then, obviously referring to Jungkook.

“My brother’s boyfriend. We’re searching for him together.”

“What?”

“Yeah. I’m not lying. There’s no time to get into the details..but it’s true. Are you going to stop me? Or help me?”

Her eyes soften.

“F-Fuck, hyung, the door won’t open!” Jungkook curses, trying to pry it open with all of his might. He then tries to hack off the door handle but it doesn’t work. Kicking it down doesn’t work either - it won’t budge.

“It won’t open,” Seoin says then. “You can’t open it that way. It’s too well-protected. What you’ve probably done is already triggered an alarm. He’ll already know by now.”

Jungkook picks up a brick from the pile in the corner of the compound, probably there due to the renovation work, and flings it at one of the windows. It bounces off, only leaving a minute scratch behind. Missile proof. Of course.

“Noona,” Yoongi repeats, maintaining eye contact with her where she stands upstairs, a plea for her help.

“Don’t make me regret this,” she says.

“I won’t.”

She looks conflicted, but speaks anyway.

“Come upstairs.”

“Jungkook,” Yoongi orders immediately, and the other boy finally abandons the door and windows with a curse. He picks up the crowbar and follows Yoongi upstairs.

Yoongi doesn’t miss how the cameras turn in their direction, following their every move. He’s almost at the finish line. He can feel it.

She opens the door for them once they arrive, and they enter.

“Don’t take your shoes off. It’s fine,” she instructs once she sees Jungkook attempting to slide out of his sneakers out of sheer etiquette. Jungkook nods, lacing them back on.

“Thanks, Noona,” Yoongi says. “Is there a way downstairs from the inside?”

“Sort of. Follow me.”

Her home is nice. She’s done it up well - lots of tapestries and rugs and plants. Her sofa looks comfy and there’s lots of art on the walls. Completely different from Taehyung's floor downstairs. Seoin’s floor has more bedrooms.

She leads them through her home till they cross into an area with protective plastic sheets over the floor. They round the corner, and that’s when they see it.

Stairs. Going down.

Yoongi’s eyes gleam.

“They’ve broken the old drywall that blocked off the internal staircase for me,” she says. “They haven’t broken the wall down at Taehyung’s yet. But it’s thin. You can kick or break it down.”

Jungkook’s already halfway down the stairs before she’s done completing her sentence.

“Thank you,” Yoongi says, before following him.

They go down the flight and stop before a blank wall. Jungkook’s already kicking it like a maniac, blows strong and powerful. The drywall does give, and with Yoongi’s help, they’re able to take it down quicker. Whoever constructed this did a shoddy job, and Yoongi’s extremely thankful.

They keep going till they can finally see through to the other side, and Jungkook hacks at the opening with the crowbar, ripping it open while Yoongi keeps kicking.

“Is it breaking?” Seoin calls from upstairs.

“Yeah!” Yoongi calls back. “Go upstairs and stay in a room. We’ll handle this.”

In his head, he’s thinking. Jimin has to be here. He won’t be able to handle it if he isn’t. He has to be. This has to work out.

Jungkook finally kicks hard enough that a big chunk of the wall gives, leaving a hole wide enough for them to crawl through. Yoongi just manages to fit and he launches himself through it, crawling through the rubble and getting up on his feet once he’s through to the other side.

He’s standing toward the back of Taehyung’s kitchen.

“Jimin!” He yells. Jungkook emerges through the hole too, and they’re both standing there.

There’s no response.

They ransack the house. Yoongi kicks the door of the first bedroom open, coming face to face with the same study and home gym he saw yesterday. Empty. The master bedroom is empty

too, but the sheets are rustled and the bed is unmade. In the ensuite bathroom however, the caddy now holds two toothbrushes. There was just one yesterday.

“Hyung,” Jungkook calls from somewhere else in the house. His tone is odd and it makes Yoongi’s heart lurch, panicked state spiking through the roof.

He dashes out of the master bedroom, his shoes skidding against the wooden flooring, and sees that the door to the room that was locked last night is now open. Jungkook is in there.

Yoongi runs, blood pumping loud and strong, and crashes his way through the doorway. It takes a while before what he sees in front of him finally registers.

It’s a pink space - with *Jimin’s room* splashed in big cartoon-ish letters on the wall. Yoongi’s stomach drops and he looks at all the special furniture and hobby desks, the sofa and projector, bile rising up his throat when he sees the clear glass armoire full of the lingerie sets.

“What the fuck,” Jungkook says, sounding exasperated.

Yoongi’s starting to feel breathless. He brings his hands up to sink into his hair, tugging it with stress.

He leaves the room, starting to yell.

“Jimin! Jimin!” He shouts. “Where are you?”

His eyes dart all over the place, manic. He prowls through the apartment, searching all the rooms he’s already searched. He checks all the wardrobes and cupboards, bending to open every cabinet that’s large enough to fit Jimin inside. Jungkook tears the place apart too.

Yoongi storms out of the guest bathroom, and then his eyes catch something.

The rug in the living room, it's moved out of place. It could've happened if one of them ran across it. But he doesn't remember either of them touching it. It's the same fucking rug Taehyung acted all jumpy about last night, when Yoseop tried to touch it.

Yoongi can see something on the ground underneath it.

He's in front of it before he knows it, and he's flinging it off.

Beneath it is a small set of doors. Yoongi tries to open it, but it's locked.

"Jungkook! Get me the crowbar!" He yells.

Jungkook's at his side in a second, sweating and panting with the crowbar in his hand. Yoongi snatches it, and uses it to pry open the doors. He grits his teeth, struggling to get the angle right and cursing when the tool skids out of place.

But soon, he's able to slot it exactly where it needs to be. And then he starts pulling.

It works after a few seconds of gruelling effort, and Yoongi yanks the doors open the moment the lock breaks.

His breath catches in his throat. Jungkook inhales sharply.

"Jimin," he whispers.

It's dark inside. Deep, but shallow enough that they can see the small figure curled into a ball at the bottom.

They've found him. They've finally found him.

It's undeniably Jimin, and he's got his hands covering his ears.. All they can see is his bony back, thin skin stretched translucent over his ribs and spine. It's splotchy with fading bruises, enough in number that it's telling how bad it must've been when they were fresh. He's trembling violently, and seems frightened beyond his wits.

"Jimin, it's me," Yoongi calls out, his voice breaking. He reaches down to touch him, a tear slipping out of his eye when Jimin jerks violently, flinching away when he finally makes contact. Jimin still isn't looking, face hidden from view.

"Let me take him out," Jungkook says shakily, carefully stepping into the small space. The moment his feet reach the bottom, Jimin flinches further, curling into the opposite corner. He's crying now, hands scrabbling bloodily at his ears as he covers them still.

Jungkook reaches downward and gingerly slides his arms underneath Jimin's body, picking him up in a single breath. It's only then that the both of them see the cast on his left foot. Jimin doesn't protest but keeps his eyes squeezed shut.

However, the moment his face gets pressed to Jungkook's chest, he opens his eyes.

He stares at him as Jungkook hands him over to Yoongi, who takes him before laying him down on the floor. Jungkook climbs out of the trapdoor.

Jimin stares up at Yoongi now, and his eyes trace over his features. They're glassy and hazy, it seems like he's having trouble focusing and comprehending what he's seeing. Has he been drugged? Was Jimin down there last night too? He was down here all along…while Yoongi was drinking upstairs. Alone in the dark. No wonder Taehyung freaked out about the rug.

"Jiminie," Yoongi says, caressing his cheek. "It's me. Hyung's here."

His eyes widen then.

“H-Hyung,” Jimin whispers. “Hyung?”

“Yeah. It’s me,” Yoongi answers, intertwining their fingers. “Finally found you, huh? Jungkook’s here too.”

Jimin’s hazy eyes drift to Jungkook then, who’s crouching next to them.

“Hi, baby,” Jungkook says, resting a hand on his knobby knee and squeezing comfortingly.

Jimin’s face scrunches up into an overwrought sob, and the tears start flowing. Yoongi scoops him up and pulls him into a tight hug, rubbing his back. His heart feels full, his soul feels replenished after what feels like centuries. He’s crying too. It’s almost hard to believe, but he knows it’s real.

“Jungkookie,” Jimin sobs.

“I’m here,” he responds.

Jungkook sits by them, still touching Jimin but giving them their time together.

Jimin wraps his arms around Yoongi’s shoulders, holding him weakly but still tight. He sobs into his collar.

“H-Hyung,” Jimin cries, fingers balling into the fabric of his hoodie. “I’m so-sorry-”

“Shhh, we’re going home now. I’ve got you,” Yoongi comforts, standing up and pulling Jimin up with him. They need to leave first. Everything else can wait.

Jungkook swoops Jimin up in his arms and they start to head toward the staircase.

However, the moment they cross the hole they created in the kitchen wall, Jimin screams just as his body writhes. Jungkook seizes up too, and exhales shakily. Yoongi's eyes widen.

"B-Back inside," Jimin croaks.

Jungkook listens, stumbling their way back into the house. His knees buckle as soon as they're back inside, but he's careful to make sure Jimin isn't hurt as he slumps to the floor.

"What happened?" Yoongi demands.

"S-Shock collar. Can't go outside," Jimin responds shakily, voice barely audible. His words are slurred, nearly incomprehensible. He's definitely been drugged.

"Sit here, both of you. I'll see whether I can get the front door open."

Yoongi stalks toward the front door, eyes widening once he sees all of the locks. There are more than he can count. Some he's able to disengage, but he soon realizes that most of them need keys. He then tries to break it down, but no amount of powerful kicks is enough to even make the door budge. It's like it's built into the wall.

Meanwhile, Jungkook cradles Jimin in his arms. Jimin clings to him, and Jungkook smiles as he kisses his forehead.

"This isn't going to work," Yoongi announces. Jungkook looks up then, eyebrows furrowed.

"We'll cut the collar off," Jungkook responds, scanning the room for Yoongi's backpack so he can get the knife. He gently lays Jimin out onto the floor before he moves.

“Call the cops first and then find the knife. We can cut it off while they’re on their way here,” Yoongi instructs. There should be enough evidence that this relationship wasn’t consensual - given Jimin’s injuries and bruises.

Jungkook nods, pulling out his phone and calling the emergency line.

“Hello! This is an emergency, I’ve found a kidnapping victim and we’re trapped. Please help us, we need medical aid and law enforcement! The address is…”

Yoongi approaches Jimin, scanning the rest of him as they wait for Jungkook to find the knife.

“I’m sorry I took so long,” Yoongi says, looking him in the eyes. “Are you hurt? Anything I need to look at immediately?”

Jimin shakes his head.

“O-Only my foot. I can’t put any weight on it,” he answers, sluggish as it is. “I can’t believe you’re here…H-Hyung, I thought I’d never see you again. I got s-scared when I heard and saw the wall being broken so I h-hid down there and accidentally locked myself in.”

“I-”

They’re interrupted by the sound of the front door beeping. Yoongi’s blood runs cold, and Jungkook pauses momentarily too before he starts to ransack the bag even harder. Jimin freezes up.

“H-Hyung, he’s here-”

“Shhh. I’ll handle it,” Yoongi responds. He was expecting this. Taehyung would’ve been alerted by some alarm or the other.

The front door swings open, and Taehyung walks in. He's dressed in a baggy hoodie and shorts. Jimin freezes up in Yoongi's arms, and Jungkook finally stands up to his feet, finally having found the knife. His eyes trail over Yoongi, and then Jimin, before finally falling on Jungkook.

Taehyung smiles.

"Looks like you've all made yourselves at home," he says. "Nice to finally meet you, Jungkook."

"Go fuck yourself," Jungkook spits. "We're leaving. It's over."

Taehyung laughs, and then he shuts the door closed behind him. He presses a button in the locking mechanism, before turning back to face them.

"I don't think so. The door isn't going to open unless you input the code. Which only I know. It won't budge no matter how hard you try to raze it down…just like you have with the rest of my home from what I can see. Guess no amount of education can buy class, huh, Yoongi?"

Yoongi knows him well enough to realize that Taehyung's just trying to get a rise out of him. He won't bite.

"Yeah…and I guess no amount of forcing someone to stay with you can get them to actually love you, right? Can't do what's impossible."

"Oh, he loves me," Taehyung responds, his eyes glinting as his voice turns harder. "We've been together too long for him not to. Jimin, come here."

Jimin's eyes widen before they squeeze shut, and Yoongi moves to stand in front of him.

“Don’t talk to him.”

“Jimin, come here. Right now,” Taehyung orders.

“Did you not fucking hear me?” Yoongi asks, stepping forward. “Stop fucking talking to him, or I’m gonna rip your fucking throat out.”

Taehyung’s face hardens.

“You could never just mind your own business, could you? Min Fucking Yoongi. I’ve fucking hated you for so long now. I have to admit, seeing you all weepy and depressed these past few months gave me the utmost pleasure. Although not as much as much pleasure as I’ve felt fucking your little Jiminie’s brains out for just about 4 years,” Taehyung continues. “He’s probably got my cum running down this thighs right now-”

“You’re not going to get a rise out of me and make me let my guard down,” Yoongi responds, although he feels a pulse of rage inside of him. He has to be careful, because they haven’t gotten the collar off Jimin yet, nor is there a sound escape route. “We’re walking out of here right now. Don’t care if I have to rip you apart to do it. That’s going to happen anyway.”

“*You?* Rip *me* apart?” Taehyung demands, incredulous.

“Why not? I’ve done it before, haven’t I? Can’t count the number of times I’ve shown our entire team what a weak bitch you are in the ring. I do suppose it’s even more embarrassing now - the fact that you have to resort to holding someone hostage to feel whatever you think is love. What’s everyone gonna think then?”

Taehyung’s eye twitches.

“Not just a little bitch, but a desperate and sad little boy. A loser. Did mommy and daddy not give you any attention growing up?”

That seems to do the trick.

Taehyung charges at him and swings an arm at his face, and Yoongi dodges, surging forward to punch him clean in the jaw.

Taehyung staggers backwards a few steps with the force of it, and attacks Yoongi once more. This time, Yoongi gets hit in the head, and his back crashes into the wall behind him.

“Hyung!” Jungkook shouts.

“I’m fine,” Yoongi grits out, his head spinning. “F-Focus on what’s important.”

Jungkook seems to get the message. He rushes toward Jimin and tugs the collar round his neck taut, using the knife to slice through it. It isn’t easy, and it doesn’t happen as quickly as they need it to. It’s like whittling at wood.

Taehyung whips his head toward them and attempts to intervene, before Yoongi grabs him in a desperate attempt to stop him, even if it puts him in a vulnerable position defense-wise. He’s expecting it when Taehyung punches him in the stomach, hard enough that he feels blood pooling into his mouth. Taehyung seems to be a lot stronger than he was back when they were in school. It disorients him and he falls to the ground, and Taehyung crawls over him, restraining him. He gets punched across the face then.

“I’m fucking sick of you,. Who’s the bitch now, huh? I’m going to fucking kill you, I’m not gonna let you take him,” Taehyung grits through his teeth, wrapping his large hands around Yoongi’s throat and squeezing. He’s strangling him. Yoongi chokes, but has enough presence of mind to punch Taehyung in the ribs as hard as he can, repeatedly. But he doesn’t let up. Taehyung’s face is hard, eyes blazing, and Yoongi’s only hoping that Jungkook’s got the collar off by now.

The pressure on his throat releases.

Taehyung's yanked off him as Jungkook puts him in a chokehold and drags him backwards, getting him onto the floor. Yoongi's vision is still spinning, but he can vaguely make out Taehyung struggling to get out of Jungkook's grip.

Jungkook throws him to the floor and punches him in the nose. Blood spurts out of his nostrils, and Yoongi gets a glimpse of Taehyung's eyes. They're crazed with a demonic anger. Jungkook punches him once more in the throat. And then another time across the side of his head. When Taehyung seems dizzy, Jungkook grabs him from behind and starts to choke him.

"J-Jimin, run," Yoongi instructs. "Go upstairs and run outside through the external staircase."

He hopes Jimin can hear him, and he sits up, throat heaving. He can feel blood trickling out of his nose.

Taehyung's scratching at Jungkook's arms in a bid to get free, thrashing over the floor. How is he holding on so long? This much would've been enough to knock anyone out. Jungkook's struggling to hold him down securely with the way he's moving, and the chokehold seems to do little to incapacitate Taehyung. Jungkook uses his knee to hit Taehyung in the ribs concurrently.

Yoongi's vision finally focuses. Jimin's hyperventilating in the corner, and his collar isn't all off yet. He can't leave. Jungkook must've abandoned the job to save Yoongi. And then he notices the way that Jungkook's still holding the knife, gripped tightly in his hand that's connected to the arm wrapped around Taehyung's throat.

Yoongi looks at Jimin,

"Stay there. Don't come close, you hear me? You could get hurt."

Yoongi runs forward and holds Taehyung's legs down in an attempt to quell his thrashing. They need to choke him out till he faints, and then they'll deal with him when Jimin's safely out of here.

Yoongi punches Taehyung in the face. He does it again, and again, seeing how Taehyung's eyes grow more distant amidst the choking and repeated hits. His arms flail and he keeps trying to kick his hips up and topple Yoongi off of him.

A lot of things happen in the next few seconds.

Taehyung shoves his fingers into Jungkook's eyes. His grip falters, and the blade falls out of his hands, clattering to the hardwood floor. Taehyung snatches it.

Yoongi feels a burning pain across his stomach and then watches Taehyung plunge the blade into Jungkook's neck.

A sick gurgling sound emerges from Jungkook's throat, and his eyes blow wide.

Yoongi's eyes widen, Jimin screams.

Taehyung pulls the blade out, and blood spurts out of the wound in Jungkook's neck, pouring down in a fast, heavy stream. The other boy's hold on Taehyung weakens, and his eyes start to glaze out. Yoongi looks down and sees the fabric of his own hoodie starts to soak with blood. Taehyung slashed him across the stomach. But that's not what matters right now.

Jimin runs forward, stumbling as he tries to pull Taehyung off Jungkook. One simple push is all it takes for him to fall.

"Jimin, stay back! J-Jungkook, let go-" Yoongi shouts. The other boy is still trying to keep his grip on him although it looks like he's choking on his own blood.

Yoongi curses, trying to hold Taehyung down even as he stabs him in the thighs in a bid to get him off him. He does it again and again, the blade sinking into the muscle. It hurts, but

Yoongi doesn't give him even an inch to work with, focusing on keeping him down. Only flesh wounds, not like Jungkook's which already looks to be fatal.

Yoongi tries to hold Taehyung's arms down but only just misses getting slashed across his fingers.

Jungkook's blood outflow starts to increase, pouring in waves down his shirt and dripping onto Taehyung's body. The boy's eyes start to droop shut. He finally lets go of Taehyung, although it doesn't look like it's by choice.

"Jungkook, hang in there-" Yoongi grits out.

Taehyung reaches up and grabs Jungkook's hair, yanking him downward. He presses the knife to his throat.

"Get off me or I'll kill this bitch," Taehyung orders, voice shaking.

Yoongi thinks. Jungkook's going to bleed out and die if they don't get him help or stop the bleeding. Inside, he knows they're already too late. But it's worth trying. He doesn't want Jungkook dying here. Not like this. Where are the fucking cops?

If Yoongi gets off Taehyung, he'll have to dash back to avoid a stab wound. Then, he can get Taehyung as he tries to stand up.

Yoongi pushes up and off Taehyung in a millisecond, and proves himself right, missing the blade by a fraction of an inch as Taehyung aims to plunge it into his stomach. When he misses, Taehyung turns around and stabs Jungkook in the chest.

"No!" Jimin screams.

Jungkook’s already unconscious at this point, and the blood starts to spread around him a glossy crimson pool.

“I’m g-gonna fucking kill you for touching what’s mine-” Taehyung grits out. Yoongi dashes forward.

Taehyung plunges the blade into Jungkook’s abdomen several times before Yoongi tackles him, and the knife goes flying across the room. Yoongi can feel his own wounds start to bleed out but he doesn’t care, punching Taehyung across the face, hard enough that his nose breaks.

“Jimin! Take the knife, cut your collar off and go upstairs! Run!” Yoongi screams. Jimin’s sobbing at Jungkook’s side, trying to quell his bleeding with his hands. There’s so much of it. It’s all over the floor, splattered across the walls. Yoongi’s struggling and panicking with preemptive grief.

“My baby-” Jimin sobs, his whole chest heaving. He takes Jungkook’s face in his hands, bathing his cheeks with his blood. “J-Jungkookie-”

“Jimin, get out!” Yoongi screams once more. His body is starting to give out, and Taehyung’s able to overpower him and switch their positions. Yoongi brings his hands up to block his face, and does his best to absorb the hits. He’ll do it and hold out as long as he can so Jimin can get away.

Yoongi's heart is rife. He looks at Jungkook, at how still his body is. They’re too late. The grief is suffocating and all-consuming.

Yoongi sees Taehyung’s hands reaching to grab the crowbar they’d used to open the trapdoor, laying a few feet away from them.

“Can never win a fight the fair way, huh?” Yoongi taunts. “Always need to fucking cheat.”

“Oh, I can,” Taehyung starts, seething. “Jungkook just got a little special treatment. And you’re next. I’m going to bash your head into pulp and make Jimin watch as I put the both of you through a meat grinder.”

Yoongi laughs, his mouth bloody.

“All this proves is that you’re just a loser who isn’t good enough to win a fight on his own. Always need a crutch…just like you needed daddy and mommy’s money to get you into school. Everyone talks about how you’re a fucking loser in your class.”

Taehyung snarls.

“I’ll show you,” he spits.

It’s a good enough distraction. Yoongi’s losing too much blood at this point. He can hardly feel the first punch, and his head grows too heavy. When the next one comes, he’s numb.

The blows suddenly stop, and Taehyung seizes up above him. Yoongi opens his eyes, faced with Taehyung swaying slightly above him. Yoongi squints, trying to focus.

Jimin stands behind him, holding the crowbar. He swings it at Taehyung’s head this time, but Taehyung intercepts it.

“You fucking bitch-” Taehyung starts, fist shaking where it grips the edge of the crowbar.

But Jimin pulls out the knife and stabs him in the shoulder. Taehyung’s shirt starts to soak with blood.

He stabs Taehyung once more, now in the back. He looks hysterical, his eyes wild and hard. It looks like he’s feeling enough anger and heartbreak for a million lifetimes. He’s crying as he does it, and he won’t stop.

“Jimin-” Taehyung roars, enraged. The next impact has blood spurt out of his mouth.

“I hate you,” Jimin sobs. “You killed him! Get off my h-hyung!” He shrieks.

Taehyung attempts to turn around but Yoongi uses his last bit of strength to restrain him. He’s not going to let anything happen to Jimin. Not anymore.

Jimin just cries, stabbing him over and over till he slips off Yoongi’s body.

They hear police sirens mere seconds later.

Chapter End Notes

uh...um...so I'll see y'all next thurs for the grand finale

And that's the 19th chapter!!!!! If you enjoyed it, PLEASE feel free to let me know in the comments!!! I would love to hear from you, and read your thoughts!!!! <3 Please feel free to be as little or as much detailed as you want!!! It would really really make my day!!

Follow me on Twitter!

If you enjoyed and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

Thank you once again, I love you all <3

Chapter 20: Horizon

Chapter Notes

And here we are...at the end. Doesn't time fly?????????

Friendly reminder to please reread the tags and visit the beginning notes on the prologue!!!

I hope you enjoy!!

Jimin can’t stop the trembling.

He tries to resist it, keep his body still, but it just won’t work. He’s tucked underneath a weighted blanket, back cradled by the soft worn mattress beneath him. He’s in comfortable clothes, feels no overt aches and pains, but the trembling won’t stop. It hasn’t for two weeks now.

A few feet away from him, Yoongi sleeps. He’s snoring lightly, ordered to rest on his back to not reopen or disturb the dressings on his wounds. Jimin knows they hurt, that moving has become a chore for his hyung, but Yoongi always pretends that he’s fine. That everything is fine, and that nothing hurts. He’s been prescribed a million painkillers to keep him numb, but Jimin’s glad that they at the very least tucker him out enough so he can get his rest.

Jimin’s trembling so hard his teeth chatter. His thighs knock together, bony knees gnashing. His hands feel clammy and his skin is frigidly cold, the phantom tacky sensation of Jungkook’s drying blood still glaring on his fingers. There’s a hole carved in his chest. It’s only them in the apartment, Yoongi and him.

“Hey,” he hears.

Jimin feels Yoongi’s warm hand enclose his wrist.

“You okay, baby?” His hyung asks, voice rough with sleep.

“ ‘s nothing. Sorry I woke you up, hyung,” Jimin responds, as quiet as a mouse. He hadn’t noticed that the snoring stopped. The trembling becomes worse, and he feels his bones clatter against the mattress, so hard it nearly hurts.

“Shit, Jiminie, you’re freezing,” Yoongi says, louder this time as his hand drifts down to skid against his thin arm. He makes to sit up. “Let me get you another sweater-”

“No!” Jimin exclaims, surging up sharply. He gently pushes Yoongi back down. “Don’t get up. You’ll reopen the stitches.”

“So what?"

“It’ll be the th-third time. Bet the doctors are sick of you,” Jimin says. “I don’t need a sweater, hyung. Don’t worry. Go back to sleep.”

“Jiminie…”

“Hyung, please,” Jimin pleads, his voice cracking. “I’m fine.”

Yoongi finally gives in. The meds make him drowsy enough that Jimin can see him losing the battle to sleep in a matter of seconds. He strokes Yoongi’s hair, combing it off his forehead the moment his hyung’s breathing evens out, the permanent frown on his face easing. Jimin leans down and presses a kiss to his cheek, a single tear slipping out of his eye.

Jimin allows himself to be a little selfish. He settles back into bed, tucking himself underneath the blanket, and rests his head over Yoongi’s chest. He shoves his freezing toes underneath his hyung’s warm ones, his right arm draped over his ribs, just above the slash wound. The cast on his foot was taken off two days ago.

Slowly, Yoongi’s warmth starts to make him feel like he’s thawing. The trembling slows down to the point it’s hardly noticeable.

Jimin’s no stranger to sharing a bed with his hyung. They’d done it their entire lives till their parents started earning enough to move to a new house where they could have their own rooms. Even then, for the first few years, Jimin would sneak into his hyung’s room and curl up next to him, unused to solitude. He’d do it less frequently as the years went by, but there’d always be the odd bad day or scary thunderstorm that would make him feel like he had no choice to relive a little part of his childhood, seeking the safest form of comfort in his hyung.

But it stopped the moment he started to see Taehyung. He didn't want Taehyung to think that he was a baby. The moment he'd noticed the pattern of Taehyung climbing up to his window, Jimin always wanted to be available for him. Always. He'd decorate his room and hope Taehyung noticed the way his sheets smelled like lavender, or think Jimin was just as pretty as the fairy lights he'd saved up to buy with his allowance. He'd run home right after school, always reluctant to leave his room because he was always, in a way, waiting for Taehyung. His heart would light up and swell like a hot air balloon the moment he'd hear the familiar sounds of Taehyung vaulting himself over his railing, the exasperated handsome smile he'd give Jimin. The way his arms would envelop him when Jimin ran to hug him, the rumble of his chest. The way he'd push Jimin's hair behind his ear, large hand gripping his waist in a way that made him feel drunk and dizzy. Taehyung held his heart in the palm of his hands. Jimin's throat always felt heavy when Taehyung looked at him the way he did. His eyes felt glassy and his body loose. It was perfect till they went to college, and things changed. But now, Jimin knows that it was never perfect. Not even close. But if it felt like anything at all back then, *perfect* would be the only descriptor to do it justice.

Sharing a bed with Taehyung was…well…nice. When Jimin was still ignorant to the truth. By then, Jimin had already fallen in love with every little bit of him - including the way he held him. Taehyung always touched him like he couldn't bear not to. He'd wrap his arms around Jimin, caging him from behind, and Jimin often made a habit of curling his little fist into Taehyung's large open palm, wanting to be held in every way possible. He felt looked after, possessed. He belonged to Taehyung. He also felt a sense of pride whenever Taehyung would fall asleep next to him - because he knew his boyfriend had trouble sleeping. He felt special, like he was the only remedy, and that Taehyung only felt comfortable around him. Back when Taehyung had stayed over the first time, he was awkward in a way Jimin didn't know him to be, eventually coming clean to Jimin that he'd never shared a bed with anyone in his life before because he always felt uncomfortable. Jimin felt thrilled to be the first and hoped dearly to be the last and only one too. Even though Jimin now knows that most of what Taehyung told him were lies, he knows that part wasn't.

Jimin knows he loved it, but he somehow can't recall any sensation of it anymore. Back when he enjoyed it.

What he does recall, and what he thinks he always will, is sharing a bed with Jungkook. How it felt to be so deeply smothered in love and safety. The sweet sounds of Jungkook snuffling in his sleep, the way his soft skin runs hot, hot and hotter. The way he pulls Jimin closer unconsciously, shoving his nose into the tender spot of his neck. Whenever Jungkook went to bed extremely tired, there'd be the odd instances where he'd talk in his sleep. Secret conversations Jimin cherished, ones that Jungkook never recalled when morning came. Jimin always felt like he was bursting with love, so much of it he couldn't possibly contain it within himself. He'd snuggle so close there wasn't an inch of space between them, always

swallowed up and tangled in each other. And he had it every night. And it always felt right. It felt cloying enough to induce a high, a manifestation of Jimin's deepest desires and needs. They shared this very bed for countless happy nights.

Jimin's face scrunches up and he cries, his tears blotting Yoongi's t-shirt. He wants Jungkook so badly. He grieves. It's too much to take, it always is. Remembering. Realizing it's because of him.

He pulls up and off his hyung the moment he feels his chest wring, not wanting to wake him once more. He's panting, and he clutches at his bleeding heart. No words can describe the way he'd felt his world shatter to pieces the moment Taehyung stabbed Jungkook in the neck. He'd still been sluggish from the sedative Taehyung had given him the previous night to keep him quiet during the party, but just that sight was enough to draw him out of it. He died at that moment, and continued to the more Jungkook bled. He couldn't bear it. It had been enough to shatter every bit of fright and twisted form of love he'd had left for Taehyung. And then, he snapped as he saw Taehyung attack his hyung. That was all it took for Jimin to black out and…

Jimin goes down this rabbit hole every night. Before, during the first few days, his thoughts had been loud and all over the place, rash and itching to gash. Now, they're colder and make too much sense.

Yoongi's snoring stops.

Jimin quickly settles back into bed, not wanting to wake him up yet again. He can't help but intertwine their fingers again, desperate to not feel alone.

Yoongi's silent for a few seconds before he starts to snore once more, not loud, but just audible enough that Jimin can hear it.

Jimin squeezes his eyes shut, swallows around his heavy throat, and tries to sleep.

It isn't long before the trembling starts once more.

-

“Court in session,” The judge says, sitting down in his tall chair at the podium.

Jimin and his lawyer sit down as well, at their allotted bench in the courtroom. Yoongi sits a few rows behind, propped up against his seat. It’s a sunny day, strange for winter, but Jimin feels colder than he ever has before.

“Bring the defendant in,” The judge orders. Jimin keeps his eyes on the wooden desk before him, not wanting to look up.

There’s some clammering before the doors open, and Jimin squeezes his eyes shut as he hears familiar footsteps enter the space along with the clinking of handcuffs. They slow down as they pass by him but are ushered forward soon enough. There are a few gasps from the people behind him.

“Son, what’s that thing on your face? Guard?” The judge’s voice bellows out.

“Your honour…the defendant has been uncooperative and is extremely aggressive. We put it on him for the safety of you and the court.”

Jimin finally looks up. His eyes widen.

Taehyung’s looking right at him. Except, his right eye is a deep garish blue and swollen shut, and he’s got a black contraption on his face from the nose down. It’s a…muzzle. It’s secured with strong metal clasps behind his ears. Even with his mouth covered, Jimin can tell he’s smiling. And he’s still frighteningly handsome despite it all.

Jimin squeezes his eyes shut, looking back down at his feet. His skin prickles under Taehyung’s hard and insistent gaze. It feels like it’s stripping him bare. He’s been looking at

Jimin like this every day of this trial, and never lets up for a single second.

“Take it off him this instant,” The judge orders. “What’s he been doing, biting people? Don’t be ridiculous.”

“He has, your honour. There was an altercation back in the holding cell…his hands were cuffed so he used his teeth.”

“Anyone hurt?”

“The other party lost a chunk of their cheek and their left ear, your honour. Currently under emergency medical care.”

“Jesus,” The judge says. And then he gestures for the guard to take the muzzle off Taehyung anyway. “This is what happens when we put fine young men in situations they don’t belong in.”

The guard sighs, and reaches behind Taehyung to unlock the muzzle.

The moment it’s off, Taehyung speaks.

“Thank you, your honour. All I did was defend myself,” he says, voice rough. He’s got dried blood around his mouth, tacky as it probably trickled down his chin. “My parents taught me to never take bullying.”

“A fine lesson,” The judge responds.

It took all of the first few minutes of this trial for Jimin to realize which way it was going to go. The judge sympathizes with Taehyung. Maybe it’s his spotless record and his impressive family background, indicative of sound values and strong culture, not to mention an optimistic future. Maybe it’s his usual charisma pulling its weight. Or maybe it’s the bribe

that Yoongi said he's sure is sitting in the judge's bank account, wired swiftly by Taehyung's parents. Maybe it's all of them.

The session begins.

"Prosecution would like to interrogate the defendant," Jimin's lawyer announces.

Once the motion is approved, he stands. Jimin keeps his eyes on the ground.

"Kim Taehyung, have you seen these pictures before?"

Jimin doesn't have to look to know it's the ones Daeun took of him in the hospital. His teeth start to chatter. His fingernails dig into his thighs.

"No."

"Do you know what they are?"

"Yes," Taehyung responds. "Jimin and I had an argument and I raised my hand on him."

A few murmurs in the court.

"Was this the first time?" Jimin's lawyer asks.

"Yes. I was in love with Jimin…still am. He bewitched me. I found out he was at a party with other men and I got jealous. I couldn't handle the thought of him cheating on me. My rage got the best of me. I was sorry and I'm still sorry. I'll do anything for his forgiveness."

Jimin can't believe what he's hearing. Taehyung's admitting to it…but he's making it seem like…

"And was it the last?"

"No. When he came to live with me…we had some bad arguments and I ended up losing control of myself. It's all my fault. I'm just so in love with him that I couldn't bear him breaking my heart. He has me wrapped around his finger. I'll always be sorry that I hurt him. He'll never forgive me but I'll die trying."

Came to live with him?

"And what about this-"

"See? He can't even look at me," Taehyung says, interrupting the lawyer. "Jimin, look at me."

Jimin squeezes his eyes shut further. He's trembling again. Taehyung keeps doing this. It's not the first time that he's disrupted the trial this way.

"Look at me, Jimin. Jimin. Look up. Look at me."

"Your honour, requesting you to order the defendant to maintain decorum-"

"Jimin, look at me!" Taehyung shouts, standing up. The room almost shakes with it, and Jimin feels hot tears spill down his cheeks.

"Settle down," The judge orders. "No yelling, Kim Taehyung."

“I’m sorry,” Taehyung says, breathless, sitting back down. “He just brings out the worst in me…”

Yoongi scoffs behind him.

“Your honour, there is sound proof gathered by the police and as testimonials that Jimin was held in Kim Taehyung’s residence against his will,” The lawyer says. “He did not simply *live* with the defendant as he so claims. Are you aware that the defendant also brutally assaulted Park Jimin at several points during his time held captive? To the point of broken bones.”

The judge’s face is blank.

Jimin’s already testified to this. He has. The judge knows all of this. Taehyung’s trying to downplay everything that’s happened and the worst part is that it’s working.

“I never intended to-” Taehyung starts.

“And we’ve also obtained evidence of Kim Taehyung having non-consensually filmed his sexual encounters, not just with Park Jimin but with scores of women. All recorded within the span of their relationship.”

“I was stupid, and I regret it now,” Taehyung says morosely, seeming to bear the weight of the world on his shoulders that slump low. “Everyone makes poor decisions in school.”

“That’s not all, your honour. There’s also-”

“I know everything I did was wrong,” Taehyung says, voice worn down with apparent guilt. “Including dating him because same-sex relationships are sinful. But I was hypnotized by him. I had no control over my own instincts and actions. He seduced me and soon became everything I could see. I was poisoned by love, tempted into a life of sin. I never meant to hurt anyone - and I’ll always be sorry. I will never repeat something like this in my life-”

Jimin can’t believe what he’s hearing.

“Your honour, objection! The defendant has constantly been disrupting the interrogation process with statements intended to provoke a bias, I am genuinely requesting you to-”

“Overruled.”

Jimin slumps, burying his face into his hands. The rest of the trial goes by in a blur. More back and forths, more of Taehyung derailing the proceedings with more of his sob story, making Jimin feel so small. Jimin wants to think that there’s no way the judge is really going to rule in Taehyung’s favour at the end of all of this, but he’s soon realizing that it’s probably what’s going to happen anyway. Despite all the evidence, Jimin hasn’t received a fraction of the sympathy that Taehyung has from him.

Soon, the judge rules for an adjourning. The next session will be held two days from now. As Jimin stands to leave, the guards step forward to take Taehyung back to his holding cell. Jimin knows the drill by now. He keeps his head low and covers his ears so he can’t hear whatever Taehyung yells at him, and it gets easier once his voice is muffled due to the muzzle being strapped back on. He flees the courtroom. Jimin shouldn’t rush out like this, he should wait for Yoongi who will be much slower than he is. But he’s desperate to be away from Taehyung, and not hear whatever he has to say. To not be under his eye any longer. It’s too confusing, what it makes him feel.

Jimin leaves the courtroom and leans against the wall outside, panting. He doesn’t know how long this is going to go on. How much more of it he can take. Jimin’s lawyer can’t seem to get a word in edgewise amidst all of Taehyung’s interruptions and the judge is just letting it happen. Hearing Taehyung narrate such warped versions of the truth - Jimin feels like he’s going crazy. More crazy than he already is.

“You okay?” Jimin hears. He looks up to find Yoongi staring at him, also leaning against the wall for support.

“No,” Jimin answers truthfully. “He’s going to get away with it.”

“We don’t know that,” Yoongi says, but it comes out flat and empty. “No matter what, you’ve still altered the course of his future.”

When Jimin stabbed Taehyung in the back, he hit his spine. The result of that was Taehyung losing sensation and full control of his hands, which practically eradicated any chance of him becoming a neurosurgeon. Jimin came extremely close to paralyzing him for life. The doctors said that there was a slim chance of recovery, but haven’t promised anything. Taehyung’s hands either shake too much or fail to move precisely the way he wants them to, although it’s still significant progress from how they were right after the injury where Taehyung couldn’t even feel his fingers. But knowing his parents and the resources they have access to, they won’t spare any effort to save their son’s future.

Jimin just hums.

“I’m never letting him anywhere near you,” Yoongi says. “Never. And no matter what happens, I don’t think he’s ever going to forget you standing up for yourself the way you did. You’re the one that did that to him.”

“Seeing what he did to the both of you…I couldn’t take it. Not anymore,” Jimin answers. He wants to say more, has so much on his mind, but it’s been so hard lately. To voice his thoughts. Perhaps he’d grown too used to being so quiet in Taehyung’s home. He still feels the phantom weight of the collar round his neck, his fingers reaching up instinctively to adjust it the way he used to several times a day. He still flinches when he hears doors being unlocked, and is jumpy when he’s touched by anyone but his hyung. Even showers alone feel weird now.

“C’mon, let’s go,” Yoongi suggests then. “It’s nearly 5 pm. We’ll be right on time.”

Jimin smiles then and although it’s light, it’s genuine.

-

“Ah, Jimin.”

“Hello,” Jimin greets, bowing deeply the moment he sees Jungkook’s mother. Yoongi bows too behind him.

Jimin’s sorry that the first time they had to meet in person was under these circumstances. The first time he saw her at the hospital after she’d driven down to Seoul, all he’d done was cry and apologize to her. But she’d been nothing but kind and forgiving, firm in convincing Jimin that it wasn’t his fault and that she was proud of her son for doing what was right.

“How was the trial today?” She asks, rubbing Jimin’s arm comfortingly. She’s tired, looks it too.

“The usual,” Yoongi answers for him. “Kim Taehyung is championing his own propaganda campaign. Which is unfortunately working. I’d be surprised if he ended up doing any time at all.”

Jungkook’s mother opens her mouth to respond, but Jimin interjects, not wanting to speak about it anymore.

“How’s he doing today?” He asks, taking a seat down right next to the hospital bed. He immediately stretches out a hand to comb it through Jungkook’s hair, the boy still comatose. It was medically induced to save his life, and he’s just been moved out of the emergency care unit to a general private room.

“He’s been good,” she sighs. “Vitals are stable. The doctors said he’s making good progress and might wake up soon.”

Jungkook’s always been lucky, his entire life. He boasted about it to Jimin all the time. Whatever lucky stars favour him, they didn’t fail him this time either. Taehyung, somehow, perhaps due to everything happening in a fit of rage, narrowly missed fatally stabbing him in the chest and abdomen and just scraped past his jugular. He’d suffered a punctured lung which was serious but he’s recovering from it well already. The only other severe injury was the stab wound in his stomach, which came extremely close to puncturing his abdominal

cavity. The paramedics reached them right on time. Had they arrived a minute later, Jungkook would've died from blood loss. That was the real threat, but they found a blood donor right on time. The overall trauma has still taken a toll on his body, and they're very far from being out of the woods just yet. But the situation is looking optimistic.

"That's great," Jimin responds softly, cupping Jungkook's cheek in his hand. It's no longer as full as he remembers it being. Jungkook's lost weight since Jimin saw him last. The oxygen mask covers his gray lips, and his eyes stay closed. Yoongi had told him that the other boy was extremely hard on himself after his disappearance. There are a number of bandages across his body, although most of them have stopped bleeding through by now. Jimin wishes he could stay here with Jungkook past visiting hours, but he understands why Jungkook's mother would occupy that role. And someone needs to look after his hyung too, no matter how much Yoongi insists he's fine.

"Jiminie," Jungkook's mother says then, resting a hand on his shoulder. "He'll be fine. I know he will. He's always been a fighter."

Jimin feels embarrassed that someone who came so close to losing their child has to be the one to comfort him.

"Yes," Jimin agrees, reaching up to rest his hand on hers. "I can't wait for him to come back."

What Jungkook needs is rest. Plenty of it. His body needs to build itself back up, piece by piece. Jimin stares at his face, feeling a sharp and achingly painful twinge in his heart. He resists the urge to rest his hand over the thickly-padded bandage and gauze on the side of his neck.

Jimin takes his hand in his, squeezing Jungkook's long fingers. He loves them so much, has held them more times than he can count, felt them curl and tighten around his. He loves everything about him. He sniffles, only then noticing the tears cooling on his cheeks.

I'm sorry, he wants to say. He's said it so many times before. The guilt is too much for him to bear. It feels too small, somehow, too weak to fully express what he wants to convey.

Jimin almost feels Jungkook's hand tightening around his. So slight it's nearly imperceptible. He's sure he imagined it, just the way he's been hallucinating so many things lately.

"He loves you so much, Jimin," his mother tells him, hand still warm and comforting on his shoulder. "I'll never forget the way he sounded when he told me about you for the first time, and all the times he's spoken about you after too."

Jimin sniffles once more, hiccuping over a sob. There hasn't been a single day so far that he hasn't burst into tears while visiting Jungkook. He wants him back.

They stay till the end of visiting hours, 7pm. Jimin and Yoongi hug Jungkook's mother goodbye and then they're on their way back home. Jimin helps Yoongi onto the bus and smiles at the woman who gives up her seat for him, then helping Yoongi sit down. Yoongi shouldn't be so active, not so soon, but he's insistent on being there for everything.

They walk home quietly once they get down at their stop, Jimin with his arms instinctively around his hyung's shoulders. He feels frail while his hyung is still solid, but he feels better holding him just in case he needs to stop or loses balance. The lesions on his thighs are the most severe and any walking needs to be slow. Luckily all flesh wounds.

The guilt Jimin feels is so strong, suffocatingly so. He feels it every second of every day.

An hour later, they're ready to head to bed again. This time, Yoongi makes him wear a sweater to sleep.

Jimin settles in under the covers.

It's hardly a minute in that the trembling starts again.

-

“Everyone’s talking about it, like, everywhere.”

Jimin sighs, looking up at Hyora.

“But how? It’s not even in the news,” he mumbles, curling up tighter on the sofa. He’s got a colourful throw blanket he’d crocheted a year ago wrapped around his body, but he still feels cold.

“It doesn’t have to be. Everyone in our university knows you went missing and when I told our friend group you were found, naturally, questions arose. I was happy to tell everyone who it was, I even showed them Taehyung’s pictures too. He needs to be held accountable.”

“You should’ve asked me first, Hyora…” Jimin sighs. He doesn’t want to live in this. He doesn’t want this to be sensationalized any more than it already has. He wants it to be over. Once and for all. But he also knows that that’s just not possible…at least not the way he wants.

“I know. I know. But I can’t bear him just walking off scott-free. I know you don’t like talking about it, and I’m still hurt that you didn’t confide in me about what happened. People like him deserve to feel shame.”

“But…” Jimin starts. He doesn’t know what to say. It’s just all so…vulnerable. Sharply sensitive. He’s still not used to the idea of anyone knowing about him and Taehyung. It feels alien and deeply uncomfortable. Like there’s even more of Jimin pried open for the world to see and assess, draw scathing conclusions. It’s too personal, too deeply entrenched in his thick, heavy emotional state.

Yoongi’s ringtone blares through the apartment.

His hyung is taking a nap inside the bedroom, so Jimin surges up and grabs the phone where it lies on the coffee table, hurrying to answer it before the sound wakes Yoongi.

“Hello?” he answers.

“Good Afternoon,” a deep voice answers. They sound tentative, awkward. Not someone Jimin recognizes.

“Who is this?” Jimin asks cautiously.

“My name is Yoon Jongdae. I’m calling from Dr. Kim Namil’s office as a legal advisor. Am I speaking to Min Yoongi?”

Jimin frowns.

“No, this is his brother, Jimin.”

“Oh,” the voice says, and Jimin feels queasy at the recognition in his voice. *“Good Afternoon, Jimin. You’re actually the one I was hoping to reach. This is about the trial. Are you happy with the way things are proceeding? I-”*

Jimin’s mouth tightens to a firm line. He doesn’t want to talk to the press. He hopes this is the first and last call. He still hasn’t gotten a new phone, and his stomach twists at the thought of whoever this is digging up his hyung’s number in a bid to get to him.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know who you are. Please don’t call this number again.”

“Wait! I am calling…on behalf of the chairman. He wants to reach a settlement. He’s willing to offer you 100 million won if you drop the charges against his son, although this is negotiable-”

It hits Jimin then. This is…Taehyung’s family.

“As well compensatory cheques for medical expenses incurred, and-”

“No!” Jimin snaps. “How did you get this number?”

“Jimin, this is in your best interest. Please-”

If Jimin drops all charges, it would be pathetic. Taehyung would walk free. Not only that, there’d be nothing stopping him from destroying his life yet again. There’d be no justice. Jimin doesn’t want any money associated with him. It would be the greatest injustice against himself, not to mention his hyung and Jungkook.

He thinks about all the other people Taehyung filmed, and nausea overtakes his spirit. For the longest time, he thought it was just him. Until it all came out in court. He thinks about the poor girl his hyung told him about, who was driven to suicide. This is bigger than just him. It’s beyond just Taehyung hurting him and cheating on him.

“Tell y-your doctor to never call this number or contact me ever again!” Jimin exclaims, voice hoarse. “I’m not going to drop any charges. I don’t want your money!”

“Let’s not be rash. Chairman Kim-”

Jimin ends the call, his chest heaving. He then blocks the number and curls into himself.

To have the gall to ask Jimin to withdraw…without a single apology…to not even call himself and rather send someone else. It’s obviously about reputation. Back home, Jimin had been to Taehyung’s house more times than he can count. He’d never run into either of his parents, nor did he ever see Taehyung receive a call from them. He never spoke about them either. When Jimin had asked him about it, so used to his close-knit family, all Taehyung had to say was that they were never really familiar. Their marriage was a business marriage, and Taehyung was born because they needed an heir for their hospitals. The moment he emerged from his mother’s body, he was placed into the hands of a team of nannies who raised him till he was old enough to exist on his own. He has never hugged his parents nor has he laughed

or cried with them. It's how Jimin knows that all of this is to save face. They don't care about their son.

"Jiminie…" Hyora comforts, settling in closer and pulling him into a hug.

"I think I need some time alone," Jimin whispers. "I'm sorry."

Hyora nods, pulling away and squeezing his shoulder. "Of course. Call me when you're up to it, okay? And eat the cupcakes I brought."

Jimin gives her a weak smile.

She leaves then. Jimin's head is throbbing, still reeling from the conversation. Did they really think he'd say yes? They must've invested a pretty penny in keeping any media off the trial too. Jimin wonders what else they have planned…how much more miserable they plan to make him and his family. He hasn't even seen his parents yet because of the trial…

Jimin looks around the apartment. It's the same one he'd excitedly decorated with Jungkook back when they first moved, a place for countless happy memories, cozy and safe. Somewhere that slowly became home as time went by. It doesn't feel that way anymore. Maybe it's because Jungkook isn't here…or perhaps too much has changed. Jimin's going to have to retake the year at his university after a break, and Jungkook's in the hospital. The doctors say that he might wake up soon but there's no indication of when. Neither of them will be able to return this safe, sunny little spot anymore. The thought makes tears spring to his eyes. He can't bear losing something so precious, such a sweet aspect of his life fading into just a fleeting memory.

Jimin grits his teeth, jaw aching. He's angry. He feels it pulsing inside of him, scathing and hot. He thinks about Taehyung, how he's to blame for all of this.

How much he hates him.

The last sentiment doesn't manifest as strongly as he needs it to. He thinks it in his head, screaming it loud in the chambers of his mind. *I hate him.* But it feels half-hearted, lacking. Other things make sense and feel right, like Jimin being furious at him, terrified, disgusted, horrified, heartbroken, ready to cut ties. But the word *hate*; it still doesn't fit into his complicated puzzle of emotions. Not now. Not even after everything that's happened, little pieces of Jimin's heart scattered like crystalline shards. He's shattered him, truly, yet Jimin still cannot muster enough vitriol to use the word hate for someone who has tormented him in every shade of the word. Four simple letters strung together to form a term that is very valid and actually desired that he feels, yet still cannot.

Too much has happened. Too many confusing, overlapping events. Nothing really makes much sense anymore, if he thinks about it. Sadness is the only emotion he can truly identify and pick out.

I don't have to understand it, Jimin thinks, curling into himself as a fresh wave of frigid cold washing over his body. *It doesn't matter*.

Yoongi's phone doesn't ring for the rest of the evening.

-

Jimin's curled up next to Jungkook on the hospital bed.

He'd done it carefully and gingerly, laying on his side so there's just about enough room for the both of them to slot together snugly. All the machines Jungkook's connected to are on his left, so Jimin's taken the liberty of sticking by his right. He has his head resting on his shoulder, and his arm draped lightly over his chest. Jungkook's skin is cold, but Jimin presses the pink tip of his nose close to him anyway. He's extremely careful not to rest any weight on him, limbs nowhere close to any of his injuries.

Talk to him, they say he can hear us, Jungkook's mother had told him. She'd gone back to her hotel for a change of clothes and a shower, leaving Jimin alone with Jungkook.

"I love you," Jimin says. "I don't deserve you."

He focuses on the rise and fall of Jungkook's chest.

"Today, I made soy braised eggs. I mean, I made them last night, but I prepared them this morning with stir fried rice and some crispy luncheon meat. I even sauteed some spinach to go with it. I know you can't eat it but I still brought you some. It's in a little box in my bag. If you want some, and I know you do because you love soy braised eggs, all you have to do is open your eyes and tell me so," Jimin whispers softly into his ear. He keeps his eyes trained on his face, as if Jungkook would really listen to him and respond.

All he hears is the pulsing of Jungkook's oxygen mask, and the beeping of the monitor.

Jimin sighs. He leans in and kisses Jungkook's cheek, the part that peeks out of the mask.

"There are so many things I need to beg for your forgiveness for," Jimin says, reaching down to hold his hand. His mind flashes to every moment one by one.

His first day at Taehyung's house, Taehyung had cornered him and asked him whether he'd been intimate with Jungkook. He still remembers the questions. *Did you let him touch you? Has he seen your body? You better not have given him what's mine. I'm going to kill you if you did that to me.* So Jimin lied. He lied. He told Taehyung that Jungkook and him never progressed beyond kissing, since Taehyung admitted he'd already seen them kiss. He shouldn't have lied, but he had to because Taehyung had already gotten violent at that point. Jimin had been delirious with fear and the realization that he had been kidnapped, trapped in an isolated house he could not escape from. But he should've stood his ground and told Taehyung that he was dating someone else, that he wasn't going to give in to whatever this was. He shouldn't have ever have let Taehyung kiss him, even though it made him furious everytime he pulled away. He should've accepted whatever punishment he got, violent or not, because it would at the very least mean giving his deep bond with Jungkook the respect it deserved. Jimin acted selfishly. He had told his hyung about this line of thought and Yoongi yelled at him, telling him that he couldn't possibly have survived without doing what he did, acting smartly to save himself. That Jungkook would rather he survive than turn up dead because he didn't tell Taehyung what he wanted to hear. While that may be true, Jimin is having difficulty excusing his own cowardice…because Jungkook risked his life for him. Is still risking his life for him. Why didn't Jimin do the same?

He knows the situations aren't exactly comparable - they don't sit on par on equal sides of the moral weighing scale. But he's having difficulty coming to clear conclusions about anything that's transpired. Everything feels muddled. He supposes not everything has to be black and white, not everything has to be clearly right or definitely wrong. And then there's the part where Jimin did have sex Taehyung…right when he'd been embroiled in a psychotic break. He hardly remembers feeling anything beyond the first few hits, and the hours of darkness after. It feels hazy. He knows he would've never done it had he been sane or feeling rational…but that doesn't make it better. He's going to come clean about it once Jungkook wakes up.

"I have so much to thank you for," Jimin tells him. If Jungkook can hear him, he wants to tell him how important he is. "You saved me. Not just now, but also when we met for the first time. You saved me. You always do."

Jimin won't blame Jungkook if he wants to end things once he wakes up. He'd be surprised if he didn't.

Jimin dozes off after a while, so calm next to him thanks to the skin-on-skin contact and just his presence. He only knows because he's woken up around 30 minutes later with a few polite taps on his shoulder, opening his eyes to see a nurse hovering around awkwardly.

"I'm sorry, please excuse me-" she starts, her cheeks flushing pink, probably not used to seeing two boys in such close proximity. "I need you to leave the bed so I can redress his wounds, please."

"O-Oh, of course, I'm sorry," Jimin answers, embarrassed, sitting up slowly and sliding off the bed. He stumbles a little on his feet but eventually sits down on the sofa for the visitors. Jungkook's mother should be returning any moment now.

"I'll be done in five minutes. You can settle back in once I'm done, I'll be quick," she tells him with a light yet comforting smile that he tries to return. Jimin averts his eyes as she lifts Jungkook's bandages and dresses all the stitches, doing it as quickly as she promised.

There's the strong smell of iodine and the disinfectant. Scents Jimin would sometimes pick up from Taehyung's clothes in the time they'd meet after class back when they were dating, and also when he'd come back home from university these past few months.

Jimin's never been around for a dressing change before. The smells suddenly prove too pungent for him to handle, either because of the memory or his rapidly sinking tolerance for unfamiliar stimuli, and he feels bile rise up his throat rapidly. He slaps a hand over his mouth and dashes toward the ensuite bathroom, only just making it in time before he throws up. His lungs burn, chest aching, knees trembling where they dig into the sterile white tiles of the bathroom floor.

He feels lightheaded and dizzy, tuckered out in every way.

There's a knock on the door.

"Sir? Are you alright? I'm all done with the dressing now," the nurse informs.

"Y-Yes, thank you," Jimin responds. He stays there for a little while longer, waiting till he hears the door open and her footsteps as she leaves along with her cart of medical supplies. Jimin eventually stands up on trembling knees, cleaning up and rinsing his mouth and face before he leaves. The moment he's back in the room, he's quick to crack open a window to let some fresh air in and get rid of the stench of iodine. It's nauseating to a point he cannot describe.

Jungkook's all wrapped in fresh white bandages now. Jimin eyes the thickest one that's on his neck, the one that's the most severe. He sits down in the chair next to his bed this time, not crawling onto it. He leans forward and rests his forehead on Jungkook's thigh, his other hand coming up to intertwine their fingers. He wonders if this would all be just one big, long dream for Jungkook, the other boy suspended somewhere deep within his consciousness. Jimin wonders what he could be going through his mind, and he closes his eyes.

He only lets himself think about that for the rest of visiting hours; about happy things Jungkook could be dreaming about. Happy little worlds full of happy little people and endless exciting moments and experiences. He doesn't want to let his mind wander too much, and he finds that it's easier now that he's here with Jungkook. Their two months apart doesn't seem to have severed that bond. If he were at home, it'd be mere seconds before his mind would bring up traumatic memories or potential tragic events that could happen, setting his body ablaze with stress and triggering a fresh wave of hot tears and sobs.

Jimin falls asleep, and remains so when Jungkook's mother returns, only rousing once it's time to leave.

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"I think it's time for us to talk," Yoongi says from where he sits waiting at the dinner table. Jimin stares at him, having just entered the house.

"About what?" He asks meekly.

"Sit down, first."

Jimin swallows around his heavy throat, bending down to unlace his sneakers and slip out of them. He walks over to the little dining table, gait choppy yet hesitant. Eventually, he plops down onto the chair opposite his hyung.

"What do you want to talk about?" He asks.

Rather than responding immediately, Yoongi stretches out a hand and takes hold of Jimin's fingers. It's only then that Jimin realizes he'd been picking roughly at his nails, his cuticles stinging. His hyung holds his hand, stopping the destructive nervous tick in its tracks.

"Us. Him. How it all started. Why you didn't tell me anything. Why you're continuing to hide," Yoongi answers. "How I can convince you you aren't in his clutches anymore."

"H-Hyung," Jimin sighs, voice watery. Deep down, he knows he's right. They haven't spoken about anything. He doesn't know how Yoongi found him, and he hasn't told Yoongi anything about the events that led up to this moment. There's so much to talk about.

"I won't get mad," Yoongi adds quietly. "I just want to understand."

Jimin inhales shakily. His eyes burn. Where to begin?

He decides to ask.

“From the start. How you met,” Yoongi answers, to the point. “I need to know what happened so I can help you untangle whatever little ball of worries you have inside you. You haven’t gotten better at all. I know it’s only been three weeks, but still. Talking would be a good start. You don’t have to tell me everything…but I’m hoping you will so everything will be out in the open for us to sort out and understand. This conversation is long overdue, Jimin.”

“Hmmm,” Jimin mumbles, biting at his bottom lip. He wants to pick at his nails but Yoongi’s still holding his hands.

“I won’t get angry with you. You know that, right?”

Jimin knows. He also knows that even if Yoongi gets angry, he’s still safe with him. He always will be. A thought process he didn’t have the capacity to have back then.

He eventually nods. Yoongi exhales a sigh of relief and leans back against his chair.

“Tell me how you met,” he says.

Jimin's jaw tightens as the memories flood in.

“The f-first time I saw him was at one of your Taekwondo meets. I t-thought he was handsome. But I didn’t approach him or anything. The next time I saw him was during my first day of high school, we’d made eye contact and my heart started beating super fast. He looked at me a lot too,” Jimin starts, keeping his eyes on the scratched surface of the wooden table. “The first time we spoke was when he’d come to our house looking for you.”

“Looking for me?” Yoongi asks, frowning. “He came to *our* house?”

“Yeah. S-Said he had plans with you or something,” Jimin responds.

“Jimin, that’s impossible. We were never friends. He knew I couldn’t stand him. How the fuck did he know where we live, and have the gall to come over when I wasn’t there? He must’ve planned it.”

That’s news to Jimin. Taehyung always made it seem that he and Yoongi were great friends. Was it a tactic to get Jimin to let his guard down?

“W-Well, that’s what he told me. He asked to come inside anyway, and we spent time talking. It was nice. It w-was my first time receiving any sort of romantic attention from anyone so… I was thrilled. I started to like him immediately. We exchanged numbers and we continued to hang out until he kissed me. He told me that we couldn’t tell anyone because he wasn’t ready. I asked him countless times about whether I could tell just you if no one else but he always said no.”

“Did he ever hit you? Back then?”

“No,” Jimin answers. “But sometimes when we fought, which we rarely did, he would grab me and it would hurt. I would get scared and there would be an uneasy feeling in my tummy. He always said sorry after and the feeling would go away after a while. It was really easy to make him angry.”

Yoongi inhales shakily.

“I fell in love with him. Right at the start. I just wanted to be perfect for him. He’d sneak up to my window most days out of the week and spend the night. Most of the time he’d be gone before I woke up. But I was happy. I was so happy. All of the times I told you I was with my study group, I lied. I was with him,” Jimin confesses. “There was never any study group. H-He was the only person I had in my life except you and our parents. I didn’t have any friends. He made me feel like I was alive. I’m sorry for lying, hyung. It always felt wrong but I just

wanted to respect his wishes. I was terrified of losing him." A tear leaks out of his eye, rolling down his cheek.

"It's okay, Jiminie. I'm not angry with you."

Jimin sniffles.

"I'm still sorry. I've made your life s-so hard," he sobs then. "I wish I wasn't so *stupid*-"

"Hey," Yoongi interjects, squeezing his hand. "You being trusting isn't a shortcoming. He's the one who's to blame for all of this. All you were was kind and considerate, and I'm proud of you."

Jimin looks up at him, his mouth trembling as he tries not to burst into tears.

"H-Hyung," he whispers.

"Go on."

Jimin talks about university then, and how Taehyung's temper and possessiveness grew worse. The first time he'd really scared Jimin, and then the incident that shattered Jimin's whole world. It spills out like an avalanche, words flying out at a rate faster than Jimin can really comprehend. He talks about Daeun, how she saved him but broke his heart by revealing she'd been seeing Taehyung too and knew what he was like. What he picks up on is that not all this is news to Yoongi. Yoongi doesn't seem surprised when he hears about Daeun, or about the night at the warehouse. While he does lean forward and wipe away his tears, hugging him to console him, Yoongi barely reacts the way you would to learning about events like this for the first time.

"Why do I feel like I'm telling you what you already know?" Jimin mumbles, burying his face into his hands.

“I do know…a lot of this. Daeun helped us find you. I got in touch with her over email and she called me.”

“You know her?” Jimin asks, bewildered. “How?”

“Jimin, we searched every inch of this damn city for a hint of you. We’ve spoken to every one of your friends, every employee in your dorm and every coworker from both of your part time jobs. We spent days putting up your posters all over the city. The cops wouldn’t do shit, it was all up to us. I found out about Daeun through your old colleagues at the boutique and Hyora got me her contact details. I know about what happened at that party because Daeun took pictures and your old roommate Duho told me you were injured. I figured it out it was Taehyung through millions of little pieces along the way and we tailed him for days before we felt it was safe to come get you.”

Jimin feels bowled over. It’s not that he’s unfamiliar with how deeply loved he is - far from it. Jimin’s just overwhelmed by how real it is at this very moment. To do so much, go so far. To sacrifice so much. Just to get him back.

“I tried to escape, I did-” Jimin sobs, words spewing out. “I t-tried to open the door but he’d put the shock collar on me so I couldn’t go anywhere near the windows or door. I tried to fight him and got hurt. I tried to sneak a note out and it backfired. I even tried to lace his protein shake with sleeping pills…but he figured it out and hurt me. It’s h-how I broke my ankle. I came so close to calling you…but I chose to delete the video I thought he had of me first. I was a f-fool, I had no idea he had so many more I didn’t even know about. He’d promised to delete it back then…he promised! If I had called you first…maybe I could’ve left sooner. But he s-said he’d been watching me for a while and there was no guarantee he wouldn’t kill me before you arrived if he found out…”

“You *survived*,” Yoongi tells him. “That’s all I care about. I’m so, *so*, proud of you.”

Jimin’s mouth clamps shut and he squeezes his eyes closed, inhaling shakily. Yoongi pulls him into his chest, enclosing him in a warm embrace. “I’m proud of you,” he says. He repeats the same sentence into his ear over and over.

“I didn’t tell you because I was terrified,” Jimin whispers against the fabric of his hoodie. “All I could think about was you being disappointed in me for harbouring such a big secret… and for lying to you for years. And the thought of you seeing those pictures he was blackmailing me with made me want to just…end my life,” he confesses. “It was more than just having my career destroyed before it even started, or getting kicked out of university. It would erase my final safe space, you. You would never be able to see me or love me the same way. And Jungkook, I’d just started fresh with. My life would have ended one way or the other.”

“Jimin, I will never ever be disappointed in you. There’s nothing you could ever say to me that would make me leave your side. Nothing in this damn world,” Yoongi responds, voice firm. “I’m not mad at you. I never was. I know how hard it must’ve been for you, and I do understand why you did what you did. It’s my job now to tell you that there is no universe where I would not fight for your happiness and safety. You’ll always have support in me.”

Jimin draws in a sharp inhale.

And then, he breaks. He shatters into a storm of sobs, clutching at his hyung. He’s feeling so much that he can’t quite put a name to any of it. It knocks the wind out of his lungs.

But what it is, is the most freeling feeling he’s felt in a long time. He finally feels like he’s out of Taehyung’s home, and has finally in some form escaped that phase of his life. Even if he isn’t out the gate yet, it’s still been cracked open for some fresh air and an end in sight, clearing a path for him to walk through.

“I love you, hyung.”

“I love you too, Jiminie. Always and forever.”

-

“Do you think we’ll make it?” Jimin asks Taehyung, curled up over his chest. He’s had one of the best days of his life ever. They had a fire scare in their high school which turned out to be

just someone who hit the alarm for fun, but everyone got to go home anyway. Taehyung had texted Jimin to tell him to go home, and that he'd come over too.

So Jimin had rushed home, quickly cleaning up his room even though it was already tidy. He showered, lathered his body with lotion, and put on his cutest pair of pyjamas. Taehyung snuck up 15 minutes later. They'd kissed and kissed and kissed, maybe did a little more, and now Jimin's all loose and lax and loopy over his boyfriend's chest. He's the happiest he's ever been, he's sure of it.

"Hmm? What do you mean?" Taehyung asks, his large hands splayed on either side of his waist. Taehyung loves holding him there. Sometimes he leaves handprints that hurt when Jimin touches them later, but they also make him feel tingly and warm.

"I mean…do you think we'll last? The long haul?" Jimin asks, drawing circles and stars and hearts into the bare skin of Taehyung's chest with his finger.

"Yeah. Yeah, of course," Taehyung answers, squeezing him tighter. "We'll make it. I know we will."

He sounds so sure. So certain.

"How do you know?" Jimin asks, beaming as bright as the sun inside.

"You make me feel things I've never felt before," Taehyung responds. He sounds drowsy. "If there's anything that's true, it's that. You've changed my whole entire world."

Jimin feels his eyes brim with happy tears. He knows he's in love with Taehyung, but hearing things like this from him makes him feel so overjoyed that he doesn't know what to do with himself.

He wishes it stays like this, them. Always.

Jimin dozes off, feeling like he's the luckiest person in the whole wide world.

-

"Your honour, the defendant has been victim of a ruthless and targeted slander campaign by the prosecution," Taehyung's expensive lawyer says, deep voice booming across the courtroom. "Most of their statements are built on lies and taking things out of context."

"Please elaborate," the judge says.

Jimin sits at the prosecutor's table, eyes on the desk as usual. Every court session has his stomach swirling and twisting with distress.

"Please have a look at this letter Park Jimin mailed to the police a month before his supposed rescue," the lawyer says, and Jimin looks up to see the note Taehyung forced him to write projected onto the screen. His mouth drops.

"It is clearly stated here that he was safe and happy, and wanted respite from his overbearing older brother and his new partner, Jeon Jungkook. Police reports also state that the two created a scene at several points in the campus of the Seoul metropolitan region police headquarters, verbally assaulting officers and creating a ruckus. A sound forensic analysis of the note and Park Jimin's handwriting proves that he was in a calm state of mind, ruling out that it could've been written under duress."

"No," Jimin sobs. "H-He threatened to assault me if I didn't write it! We s-sat for hours, and he made me write it over and over till my handwriting wasn't shaky and the paper wasn't stained with my tears! It *was* written under duress!"

"Don't speak out of turn," the judge admonishes sharply. "Silence."

Frustrated tears spill through his lashes. Jimin closes his mouth, eyes falling back to the table. He clenches his fists, gritting his teeth. It seems to only be an issue when he disrupts the trial, not when Taehyung does it.

"Park Jimin is lying and distorting the truth to serve his personal agenda. The couple obviously fought, which is why he's doing what he can to get Kim Taehyung in trouble. He came to live with Taehyung willingly, and asked him to trash the scene of his workplace to make it look like a disappearance. All he wanted was an escape from his older brother and boyfriend, up until he stopped needing Taehyung for whatever he wanted," the lawyer continues. "Of course, Taehyung's not perfect. But he's no kidnapper. There's sound evidence to prove it-"

"Objection, your honour! This is just conjecture," Jimin's lawyer shouts.

"Overruled."

Jimin slumps forward, folding his arms over the desk and burying his face into them. He doesn't know why he's even bothering to attend these.

"Jimin, I'll tell the truth if you come over here and kiss me."

Jimin's head snaps up, bloodshot eyes meeting Taehyung's across the room.

Taehyung's staring right at him, smiling. He's been quiet all this while. The bruises on his face are healing. Jimin's cheeks flare up with a disbelieving heat, and his mouth drops open.

"You heard me," Taehyung says. "Come over here."

"Your honour-" Jimin's lawyer starts.

"I love you, Jimin," Taehyung declares.

Jimin's face twitches.

He starts to hear some screaming. He only realizes a while later that it's coming from his own throat that's aching, and that he's on his feet and several people are holding him back. It doesn't take much to restrain him given his small frame, but he puts up a fight either way. His vision hazes and circles and turns and spins. He can feel hot tears cooling on his cheeks, face red and distraught, chest heaving, rising and falling at a rapid rate. His view of Taehyung blurs as he's jostled this way and that, his face eventually slammed into the table before him by the court guard since he won't stop writhing.

Jimin just sobs, loud and wrought with despair.

"I h-hate you!" he screams to Taehyung.

"No, you don't," he responds.

No, he doesn't.

The session is adjourned once more owing to the disruption. Jimin is escorted outside with a warning. He's too busy crying to hear his lawyer yelling at him, and he buries his face into his hands.

"Hey, lay off!" Yoongi growls, shoving Jimin's lawyer back a few steps. "Don't you dare fucking raise your voice at him."

"You don't understand. Our chances of winning this were slim, but now they're practically nonexistent thanks to this stunt. Do you have any idea what-"

"I don't fucking care. You have no idea what he's been through. You've been fucking useless at convincing the judge despite all the evidence we have."

“He’s biased-”

“Which is why I asked you to report that and request a change-”

Yoongi’s phone starts to ring. He hands it to Jimin.

“Take the call,” he instructs before getting back to arguing with the lawyer. Jimin wipes away his tears, taking the blaring phone with him as he heads toward a quieter area of the courthouse. The ringing stops, and then it starts up again. It’s Jungkook’s mother.

“Hello?” Jimin answers, darting into a less crowded corner.

“Jimin,” she says. *“J-Jungkook-”*

Jimin’s nerves surge, skin suddenly ablaze.

“He’s back in the ICU, t-they just took him. Something h-happened, all the machines started blaring, they say he’s critical, something went wrong, we might lose him-” she sobs.

Jimin’s stomach drops. The world falls silent and his skin prickles, mouth drying.

“I’ll be r-right there,” Jimin breathes, ending the call. He sprints toward Yoongi, nearly tumbling and hitting the ground in his hurry to get to him. He’s hyperventilating again, tears flowing with abandon. Jungkook was supposed to get better, he *was* getting better-

“What happened?” Yoongi exclaims the moment he sees him.

“We have to get to the hospital, now, there’s something wrong with Jungkook!” Jimin cries.

Yoongi’s face steels. He nods, and the two of them bolt out of the courthouse as fast as they can.

It’s a stressful journey to the hospital. They took a taxi, flagged down the first one they saw. Yoongi asks Jimin what happened and all he can say is that he doesn’t know, which is the truth. He’s beside himself with distress, peering out of the window and waiting to see the hospital building in sight. He’s picking at the seat of the car, leg shaking as he tries to squash down the pre-emptive grief attempting to choke up his lungs.

Jungkook can’t…

The moment they reach the hospital, Jimin runs into the building. Yoongi stays back to pay the cab since he’ll be slower anyway. Jimin flies through the reception and up the stairs, just barely managing not to trip. He comes to a stop when he sees Jungkook’s mother waiting outside the emergency care unit.

“Jimin,” she sobs.

“What happened? Did you hear anything yet?” Jimin demands, running up to her and hugging her.

“N-No, not yet,” she sobs. “I’ve been trying to get a hold of someone, there’s been no answers so far-”

Jimin’s gnashing his teeth. He’s so wound up that he doesn’t know what to do with himself.

It’s a torturously long wait. There’s no other way to really describe the magnitude of the sharp pressure boring down onto Jimin’s chest, threatening to crush his ribcage and flatten his slow beating heart. Yoongi joins them after a while, and it’s so agitating that all they can do is

simply wait. Jimin feels like he's having difficulty breathing, and all he can do is just silently cry till the doctors have word.

He's restless, and he wonders how much more life expects him to endure.

Jimin never got to…thank him. For coming all the way to Taehyung's house, for all the hard work and stress that it took to get there. They never had a moment of reunion, them. He hasn't thanked him for changing his life, healing him, and sticking by his side through everything.

Jimin's not sure if he can handle not getting to do those things. He's not going to survive having to say goodbye if it comes down to it.

The doors to the emergency care unit bow open, and a doctor walks out. All three of them spring to their feet.

"Doctor, how is he?" Jungkook's mother asks, running toward him.

"We had quite a scare but he's fine," the doctor says, and Jimin feels all the air rush out of his lungs. He sags to the floor, so relieved that he starts to sob.

"He had a cardiac arrest. Probably a result of the stress on his body caused by the punctured lung combined with the other areas of trauma. It was a close call but we used the defibrillator and he stabilized right after. Some minor setbacks in terms of his recovery, we'll probably have to keep him here for longer to monitor the recovery of his lungs. He's quite a fighter."

"Yes, he is," Jungkook's mother agrees, smiling through her tears. "Thank you, doctor."

"Of course. And also, just some good news, he's woken up. Not much responsiveness but he's opened his eyes. To avoid any strain, we're going to wait for a while before we can move him back to his room and you can see him. Probably in a few days."

All of them gasp, Jimin's eyes widen. He buries his face into his hands, thanking every lucky star in the universe. He cries, because he's so grateful he can hardly believe it.

They stay for a little while. They walk Jungkook's mother back to the assigned room and make sure she eats something. They chat for a while, and then decide to head back home once she's tired and visiting hours end.

Jimin and Yoongi travel home silently. They're both exhausted, even more than usual due to the emotional and mental strain of the day's events. Jimin dozes off during the bus ride, resting his head on his hyung's shoulder. When he's awoken at their stop, he feels bleary and dazed.

Jimin knows that his outburst at the trial may have cost them the win he was already sure was impossible. He'd just snapped - lost full control of himself and gave into the dangerous cocktail of negative emotions that started to fester and swarm inside of him like a tumultuous storm. Taehyung knows how to push his buttons; say the things that hurt him, reduce his value, dig the dagger in deeper.

The feelings that come out on top are usually disbelief and despair. Disbelief that Taehyung continues to stoop so low yet still reach new heights in the way of disappointing Jimin and breaking his heart more than he already has. Despair because all any of it has brought him is misfortune that runs deeper and deeper.

But…Jungkook's awake. Yoongi's recovering. Jimin still has all limbs and fingers and toes. The world will continue to turn, and time heals all wounds. At least that's what Jimin hopes for. There are many things that seem impossible to him now. Just a few days ago, he'd heard a song playing through the speakers in the outdoor seating section of a restaurant he'd walked by - the same song that was playing at Jimin's workplace when Taehyung kidnapped him. He'd broken into cold sweat and had to brisk walk to a quiet place till his heart stopped pounding and his legs no longer felt that they would give out. Loud noises scare him, any sort of shouting or yelling. Sometimes when he gets out of bed, he startles when he feels the cool tiles of his bedroom and not the smooth hardwood floor of Taehyung's house, the disorienting experience making him dizzy and feel unwelcome in his own body. He freezes up whenever he sees someone on the streets who looks similar to Taehyung, even though he knows the other man is currently incarcerated and shutting between his holding cell and a different hospital for frequent check ups. They've come out of monsoon, but he already knows that he's going to be a mess when it starts to rain again. He feels like he's been wrung out of tears

but they just keep coming. He's so sick of crying all the time. There has to be a limit for how much sadness and terror he's expected to encounter and be put through. Terror. That's what it is. Taehyung has terrorized his life for so long now.

Yoongi's phone rings as they're entering the apartment. It's Hyora's caller ID. He hands it to Jimin to answer, probably too tired to put up with the girl's chatter. Jimin answers it.

"Hi, Hyora," he says.

"Jimin!" She exclaims. She sounds happy. *"Jungkook won the competition!"*

"What competition?" Jimin asks, toeing off his shoes and walking forward to take a seat on the sofa. He wants to tell her that Jungkook has woken up, but he wants to know what this is first.

"There was a competition for game design. Jungkook's entry came in first! He's won a cash prize, and a bunch of other things-"

Competition? Maybe Jungkook joined it after he'd gone missing. Although a game sounds quite heavy in terms of workload. Either way, Jimin smiles and feels his heart swell as he beams with pride. Of course Jungkook won. He's good at everything.

"They can't reach him…but I told them that he's in the hospital. The winners ceremony is tomorrow. Jimin, you should go and get his award and everything else on his behalf!"

Jimin swallows heavily. In public? Already? He doesn't even have his own phone yet - he's not sure if he's ready for social events…

"You have to go. He worked so hard on it, I remember our professor commending him for his work on it this whole term!"

Jimin frowns. “He’s been working on it that long?”

But Hyora would know. She and Jungkook are in the same university department, even though the two aren’t as close as Jimin and her are. Jimin is still wondering how he didn’t know anything about this. Jungkook is always either studying or working and it’s hard to keep track of how many things he has going on all the time. It’s possible Jimin missed it… considering he never understands head or tail of Jungkook’s complex coding and software work. But Jungkook would have told him if he was entering some big competition. There’s no way he wouldn’t have. They always share everything with each other.

“Yeah…I’d explain more but I think you need to see the game at the event tomorrow first. It’s going to be huge, there’s going to be talent scouts and a lot of important people. You need to go for his sake, it’s important for his future.”

He can’t let Jungkook’s hard work go to waste. This sounds really big. Jimin has to put his own personal fears aside.

“Okay. I’ll go,” Jimin concedes softly. “Send me the details.”

Hyora squeals.

“Great. I’ll be there too, so don’t worry. We can go together. You’ll love it. I’m so excited to see your-” she stops herself. “*You! I’m so excited to see y-you.”*

Jimin frowns but laughs lightly anyway.

“Okay. Me too.”

“See you tomorrow, Jiminie.”

“See you.”

Jimin hangs up then, setting the phone down onto the sofa. He finds himself smiling. Jungkook won something. That's so exciting. And he's woken up too. Jimin can't wait to give him the news. The situation feels optimistic for the first time. There seems to be an end in sight. Jungkook will be okay soon, and Jimin will be back to school soon. They'll be okay.

It all feels fixable - for the very first time. And it makes Jimin smile, and tear up once more in relief.

Jimin doesn't think he really cares about the verdict anymore. Or the trial. He doesn't care. He just wants to focus on what's in front of him.

But when Jimin thinks about Taehyung, his mind clouds with a heavy, dark fog. It's thick like soot, coating every part of his brain. Rancid. It's funny how it always renders him speechless. He feels his stomach cave inward, every one of his wounds reopening, scathingly fresh and erasing any sort of progress. He wonders if Taehyung will ever stop having an effect on him. Does the heartbreak run too deep? Too deep for Jimin to dig himself out of. It's almost like he can feel a chemical shift in his mind and demeanour the moment he thinks of him.

But then, Jimin thinks about the year after they broke up. Time helped. How he wasn't perfect…but he'd healed in some way. In Jungkook's arms, in the comfortable circle of his friends, in the enjoyment of new hobbies and work. If he did it once…he should be able to do it again. No matter how difficult and exhausting it may be. Now matter how much harder he knows it's going to be this time around.

He hopes he can.

If he can't, he just might lose himself for good this time.

-

"Sure you'll be okay by yourself?" Yoongi asks.

“Yes. I think so,” Jimin responds. “You need to stay home and rest. The past few days have been exhausting for you.”

Yoongi huffs.

“Exhausting?” He guffaws in disbelief. “I can handle *so* much more.”

“But hyung, you’re injured,” Jimin refutes. “Till everything’s all healed up you’re going to have to take it easy."

“It’s not even a big deal-"

“You were stabbed nine times,” Jimin informs, like it’s he who went through it and not Yoongi. Sometimes he feels silly and naggy. But he knows that for Yoongi, getting things done comes above everything else, even at the cost of his own health and comfort. Jimin’s not going to feel bad about being the one to make sure he gets his rest.

“Yeah, three weeks ago. And they’re all flesh wounds, it hasn’t affected my mobility as much. It’s not even just that, I don’t want you going out on your own, not so soon-”

“Hyung. I’ll be fine. It’s just an event at university. I’ll be in and out.”

Yoongi stares at him, debating it.

“Please, hyung. You’re clearly tired. It’s your painkillers. Listen to your body.”

“Fine. Okay,” Yoongi responds. “I’m sorry. I’m just so scared of…”

“I know. But I’m coming back. I will,” Jimin promises, suddenly getting teary eyed. “I’ll even get Hyora to drop me back home in her car. How’s that?”

Yoongi nods solemnly, sitting back down onto the bed with a sulky huff. Jimin, fond, leans in to kiss his cheek briefly before he pulls on his jacket. He’s wearing a nicer top with an old pair of jeans. The first time he’s dressed nicely in a long while. He’s even wearing perfume.

Jimin leaves then, stepping out into the chilly evening air and walking toward campus. It’s a walk he’s done a million times…but not in what feels like forever. He hasn’t been there ever since the last time he went to class; the day Taehyung took him. He feels nervous. According to Hyora…everyone knows. But it’s past class hours so he might not run into anyone. The rest of his friend group and other casual friends have reached out about wanting to meet…but Jimin’s not quite ready yet. Not when everything’s so fresh. There are bound to be an onslaught of questions, and Jimin does not want to end up spiralling or having a panic attack in front of people he isn’t okay being vulnerable around just yet.

The streets are bustling and busy. The awards ceremony is in 30 minutes, to be held in one of their campus’ many event halls. Jimin’s nervous, and he feels his anxiety start to thrum slowly yet steadily from within. But more than anything, he just finds he’s excited to see Jungkook’s hard work being celebrated. This evening isn’t about him.

Jimin arrives early.

There’s only a few people in the audience seats, and he can see support staff on the stage adding the finishing touches to the setup. There are huge display screens, probably to showcase the winning games. Jimin feels himself beam with pride at the thought of Jungkook’s game being played up there for everyone to see. He already knows it’s going to be wonderful. No one looks at him. Jimin takes a seat on the third row, towards the centre. Not too close but not too far, the perfect seat to blend into the middle.

There are seats for the judges by the stage, a podium with a microphone, so many posters on the wall - it all looks like a huge deal.

People start to pour in after a while. Most are students, but some are clearly guests from the professional world. Some ambient music starts to play as they inch closer to the starting time, and everyone takes their seats. When Jimin looks around the space, the entire hall seems

packed now. He recognizes a lot of faces - all of Jungkook's classmates who he's seen are here. Most of the software department seems to be in attendance, all of the professors too. There's a lot of chatter that hangs lightly in the hall in a gentle fog.

"Jimin!"

Jimin looks up, his eyes meeting Hyora's. She waves at him, beaming. Jimin watches as she starts to sidle her way through the aisle, taking his hand and yanking him up to his feet.

"What are you sitting here for? I got us way better seats up front!" She says, tugging him out of the aisle and toward a few chairs in the front row. Luckily they're toward the side in a quiet corner, just what Jimin is okay with.

"Nice and cosy, right? I asked them to save these just for us. This way our view won't be obstructed either," she cheers around a grin. Jimin can't help but return her smile, feeling some of her happy energy rub off on him as well.

There's around twenty minutes that pass before the event starts. Jimin only knows it does because the music fades out and the lights in the audience dim, while the ones on the stage spotlight the podium. The man there taps the mic before he starts to speak, oozing *extrovert* in every word and mannerism.

"Welcome to SNU's 3rd Annual Gamescon! We've got a whole lot planned for the night before the big winners reveal, so-"

"It's gonna be great," Hyora whispers in his ear. Jimin nods, smiling,

There's a lot that happens before the winners reveal. Sessions, panels, screenings. Some of it is fun, a lot of it is technical - about engines and mechanics and code. Understandable for a university event. Jimin tries to follow along as much as he can, amazed at how Jungkook understands all of this stuff. There are some trailers of new games coming up by the sponsors, some compilations of the participants working on their submissions. Jimin's heart twists when he sees Jungkook in some of the frames, eyes caught on his happy and exuberant smile. It brings tears to his eyes, and his fingers ball up into fists.

He wishes Jungkook could be here. Feel all of this excitement himself. Jimin already knows that he'd have to rub his arm and keep stroking his thigh to calm down his nervous jitters, something about Jungkook he's always found endearing.

Soon, they start to announce the winners. Jimin's tummy twists with nerves even though he already knows the results.

They reveal the runners up first. Give them their prize and certificates, and give them the stage to explain their vision. The games are extremely impressive, high in quality with interesting themes. Jimin wishes he had his phone so he could take pictures of the names and download them to support the developers.

"And now, for the grand reveal!"

Jimin holds his breath.

"Jeon Jungkook for his brilliant creation, *Jimin's Lullaby!*"

The crowd roars in applause. Jimin's eyes widen. Hyora nudges him and when he looks at her, she's smiling so wide.

A professor walks onto the stage and stands by the podium. Once the cheering starts to die down, he steps forward and speaks into the microphone.

"I am Jeon Jungkook's professor. As you all know, he is currently unwell and is on his way to recovery. We all wish he could've been here to see all his hard work reap its rewards," he says, and stops as another bout of applause surges. "Jimin's Lullaby was a concept he'd been insistent on right from the start. It features the main character, Jimin, a mage with healing powers, as he lives in a seaside town and interacts with a soft, sleepy yet positive environment to solve a big mystery and go on a fantastical adventure."

The videos of the game start to play then. Jimin watches them, slack jawed and watery eyed. He looks at the sweet, romantic cottagecore graphics. The happy little seaside and houses and people.

Jimin's character is in a 3D chibi format, and it looks just like him. It wears a fuzzy pink sweater and has lilac wings and hair, cheeks and lips a light blush tone. Some of the background renders look familiar to him, things he's seen Jungkook work on over the past few months. He would be at his system for hours into the night.

"Jungkook's work stood out to everyone right at the start because of the love, care and dedication put into every aspect of it. Everything across the board - character design, transitions, music, sequences, plot - it was all seamless and brilliantly executed. The impactful storyline and impressive gameplay despite this being an amateur competition made the final decision very easy," one of the judges says then, speaking into the microphone.

Jimin's got tears streaming down his cheeks. The love he feels is so strong in that moment that it renders him speechless, exacerbated by the potent shock that he's still feeling. To know that Jungkook made him the main character in a game that's so integral to his future…created a whole world straight out of Jimin's dreams. It's one of the grandest and most romantic shows of love Jimin has ever seen and is sure he'll ever see. It's so visceral that his chest feels tender, heart burning bright, tummy swarming with fluttering butterflies.

"We're told a friend of Jungkook's is here to collect the award on his behalf."

"Jimin, go!" Hyora urges.

She has to nudge him a few times before he stands on wobbly legs, heading toward the stage. There's some slight murmuring in the audience once Jimin climbs the stairs and is visible to everyone in the audience, and he feels his face flush with heat. He timidly approaches the judge who beams at him before handing him the prizes. Jimin wipes at his tears with his sleeve before he accepts them, smiling nervously at the judging panel and then at the audience. The photographer swoops in and captures the moment.

There's a certificate, trophy, a letter that's an offer to join the major gaming studio sponsoring the event and a cheque for the cash prize of 1.5 million won.

Jimin's eyes are wide and he's overwhelmed. He quickly bows as he takes everything, thanking everyone and scurrying off the stage. He can feel his heart thumping in his chest, everything around him suddenly too overwhelming. But as hard as it is to handle, it's all positive for the first time. Under all the jitters and waves of nervous energy prodding at his skin from within, Jimin is happy. He feels like he's full to the brim with life. He's touched and full of love. Love. There's so much of it. It makes him feel like he's glowing from head to toe, a sensation that's a gift he's found only Jungkook can give him.

He's shaking lightly with the weight of it all by the time he makes it back to his seat, Hyora bombarding him with questions as soon as he all but collapses into his chair.

"Oh my god! What did you think? Wasn't it amazing? I remember Jungkook presenting his pitch and I was soooooo in awe!! He loves you so much, Jiminie! I wanted to tell you but he told me that he wanted it to be a surprise. You're his muse in every way. He's been working on this for nearly eight months now! My submission wasn't all that much so I'm not even disappointed that I didn't win, he deserves it-"

Jimin hugs her. She stills with surprise before she hugs him back equally as tight. He buries his face into her neck, feeling his tears blot the fabric of her top.

"Thank you for convincing me to come," he says.

"Of course. He wouldn't want you to miss this for the world," she responds, stroking his back as he begins to cry.

The rest of the evening passes by in a whirl of sound and colour. A few more awards are given, there's another showcase. But everything feels like bokeh to Jimin's senses. He's floating up until the organizers announce the end of the event, and Hyora nudges him to stand. He's clutching at all of the prize items, feeling his heart grow warm when he sees Jungkook's name on the certificate, trophy and offer letter.

Hyora drops him home after, just as Jimin had promised Yoongi. When he makes it upstairs, his hyung is asleep. Thanks to the painkillers and all the other medicines, Yoongi's usually

tuckered out by 8pm. He’s asleep on the couch, positioned in a way that Jimin knows he must have dozed off while waiting up for him. His phone’s even placed right next to him.

Jimin sets all of Jungkook’s prizes on the coffee table. He walks into the bedroom, grabs a blanket, and drags it to the living room. Then, he curls up right next to Yoongi on the sofa and closes his eyes, both of them packed together tightly underneath the blanket.

When Jimin dated Taehyung, he would always have this one particular sensation that he always experienced and had come to expect and crave - it felt like there were twinkling stars in his tummy, little balls of light dancing up his heart and lungs. They’d swell and burst into a gold rush whenever he was too happy; something that happened whenever they kissed, or cuddled, or other things that made Jimin feel loved.

As he sleeps tonight, however, he feels it differently. It’s stronger. The stars, they swarm inside of him and around him and bathe him in their soft, safe, happy glow. Stronger than they’ve ever been before. All he can think of and feel is Jungkook. Is this what his love feels like? Is this what it feels like to be so lucky , lucky enough to be coated and bathed in Jungkook’s love?

Jimin falls deeply asleep and doesn’t wake till the sun comes up.

-

Jimin’s nervous.

He’s outside Jungkook’s hospital room, his arms full of his awards. Yoongi’s next to him, holding a bouquet of flowers. They can hear Jungkook’s mother's voice through the door, and she sounds happy. She must be chatting with Jungkook. He was moved out of the emergency care unit earlier this morning and back to the ward. Jungkook’s mum told him over the phone that he is tired but is talking and awake.

Jimin’s dressed well. He’s wearing the pink fuzzy sweater that is Jungkook's favourite outfit on him, which he also put into the game. He’d spent the whole morning ever since he woke up ransacking his closet for it. He’s brushed his hair and put on perfume, even put on some

makeup for the first time in months. Mostly to cover the bags under his eyes and draw attention away from his hollowed-out cheeks. Yoongi's wearing his usual baggy hoodie and jeans.

"Let's go in?" Yoongi asks.

"Yes," Jimin says. He's nervous. He wants to see Jungkook, obviously. He's beside himself with how much he yearns for it. But he's also expecting the guilt and shame that'll come with meeting someone who nearly lost their life trying to save yours.

Yoongi decides for him. He pushes the door open and walks in, holding it for Jimin to walk in behind him.

"Oh! You're here," Jungkook's mother cheers.

"Hi," Yoongi responds. He then looks further into the room. "Hey, Jungkook-ah. How are you doing?"

"Let me get your mask off, sweetheart," Jungkook's mother says, and there's the sound of some rustling amidst Yoongi stepping forward.

"Hi, hyung."

Jimin's heart seizes in his chest at the sound of Jungkook's soft voice. His tummy threatens to swallow him whole. He doesn't know why he's feeling so shy.

Yoongi turns around and looks at him.

"Jimin, get in here."

Jimin's face flames. He clutches and reclutches the bag he's holding with both hands, full of Jungkook's trophy and certificate and some other things he's brought for him.

He swallows heavily, takes a deep breath and walks in.

Jungkook's bed is propped up so he's in a sitting position. His hair is combed back neatly, and his face is pale. His eyes are wide as he looks at Jimin, and Jimin sees the way his cheeks start to bloom red almost immediately the moment their eyes meet. He looks so young, and Jimin realizes that Jungkook was probably just as nervous as he was.

He's so *cute*. Jimin feels the fondness wash over him. He loves him so much.

It feels so innocent. Or rather…uncorrupted. The excitement in both of their eyes that's equally matched with something anxious yet bashful. The way they feel about each other, the love palpable in the way it dances around them.

"Hi," Jungkook greets softly. The sound of his voice makes Jimin almost sob with relief.

Jimin rushes over to him but comes to a sharp halt as soon as he reaches the bed. He wants to hug Jungkook but he can't in fear of hampering his recovery. He wants to kiss him but his mother's here so he's too shy.

Jimin settles for taking Jungkook's sweet face into his hands. A few tears leak from the corners of his eyes, and he smiles. Jungkook leans into the cradle of his palm, and he smiles too.

"Yoongi-ah, I'd like to go to the vending machine and pick up some snacks for all of us. Why don't you come with me and help me choose what to get?" Jungkook's mother asks, walking over to Yoongi and leading him out of the room.

“Sure.” Yoongi says. They leave faster than Jimin can blink.

It’s just them now.

“Jimin-” Jungkook starts.

“I love you,” Jimin confesses, his face contorting into a sob. “You have no idea how much I love you. I thought I lost you. I really did. A part of me died that day. I couldn’t bear it, and there’s so much we need to talk about. I thought I lost you…”

Jungkook stares up at him, although his eyes are starry and widen just a bit more. Jimin continues speaking.

“I just don’t know how you always manage to…make me feel so loved. You make me feel like I’m precious. You came all that way, did so much just for me. You could’ve d-died,” Jimin says, voice breaking. “You make me feel…*so much*, and-”

“You are that much to me. More than that, in fact, more than anything. I can’t live without you,” Jungkook responds. His voice is slightly gravelly, probably due to the weeks of unuse. “Every day you were gone, all I did was think about when I’d see you again. When I’d get to hold you. I’d think about it all day and dream about it all night. It was all I wanted.”

Jimin wipes his tears away with a hand, using the other to keep holding Jungkook’s cheek. His heart thunders in his chest, and his breathing is shallow and choppy.

“I s-saw your game,” Jimin says then. “Jimin’s Lullaby.”

Jungkook inhales sharply.

“Did-"

“Yes. You won. First place,” Jimin reveals. He reaches for his bag and pulls out the trophy, handing the certificate to Jungkook. “I can’t believe you-”

Jungkook just smiles. He doesn’t seem all that surprised that he won, and Jimin’s glad. Jungkook’s always been extremely confident, it’s one of the things Jimin admires most about him.

“Y-You made a game about me? For this huge important competition?”

Jungkook nods.

Jimin laughs slightly at his easy response, although it comes out wet, sifted through his tears.

“They asked us to create something we’re most passionate about. That’s always been you, for me, from the moment we met,” Jungkook reveals, and Jimin’s heart twists. “I wanted it to be a big surprise for you. Because I know the things you like…and I wanted it to be a dream world for you beyond what I can give you in this life-”

Jimin leans in and kisses him, salty tears running down his cheeks. He’s feeling just as overwhelmed as he did at the award ceremony. At all of Jungkook’s grand shows of love. He feels it so strongly that it almost feels like he’s struggling to breathe. Jungkook’s lips are chapped, but it really doesn’t matter. Not right now. Jimin feels his heart singing, and he starts to feel warm for the very first time in forever.

Jungkook caresses Jimin’s cheek, and Jimin intertwines their fingers together. They’re both crying.

“Thank you,” Jimin says wetly, in between tender kisses. “I’m so glad you’re back. It’s all I wanted.”

“I love you,” Jungkook whispers.

The door opens, and the two of them spring apart. They laugh once they do, and Jimin feels shy and giddy, in the same childish way he always has with Jungkook. The purest form of love. It feels like their own little secret - the kisses they just shared. Yoongi and Jungkook’s mother walk in hesitantly.

From then on, it’s a sunny afternoon. The curtains in the room are pulled open, and the sky is blue. They eat and cry and laugh. Jimin reveals all the things he’d brought for Jungkook - some banana milk, volumes of his favourite comic and some gloves he’d crocheted him because Jungkook’s hands were always icy cold whenever he’d visit. However, now, they’re warm and teeming with life in Jimin’s gentle hold. The nurses keep popping in and warning Jungkook not to move a certain way, and not to attempt leaving the bed, things that everyone in the room knows he’s going to have a gander at sooner rather than later given his restless nature.

Jungkook’s mother is thrilled to see his award, and Jimin proudly hands her and Jungkook the bag with everything else. The offer letter inside is revealed to be from Jungkook’s dream gaming company, and a solid ticket for his future.

It all feels optimistic. And so special. Jimin feels like he’s on a high.

He just might survive this.

-

The air is cold, and tension is high.

Jimin’s got his eyes on the table again. His lawyer is next to him, shuffling through a bunch of papers. There are murmurs floating around the courtroom as people file in, although the turnout isn’t much, nor has it been ever since the start of the trial.

The session is slotted to begin in the next 40 minutes. Jimin's lawyer advised them to come early.

Because today is when the verdict is to be announced, and this case lays to rest.

So far, the odds aren't in Jimin's favour. Far from it. Taehyung's experienced and expensive lawyer has succeeded in bending the truth and portraying it in a different light. At this point, Jimin just wants it to be over. So that his life can finally move, and so that he can focus purely on himself and those around him. As long as they're embroiled in this, Jimin is a victim who won't get his restitution.

Jimin spaces out for the rest of the 40 minute wait, and startles once the judge walks in. He announces that the court is in session.

Taehyung is brought in. He says something that Jimin doesn't hear because he puts his hands over his ears and closes his eyes as he walks past him.

The lawyers deliver their closing statements, and then the judge speaks. Jimin sits through it like a spectator.

"I will now announce the verdict."

Everyone stands.

Jimin's practically checked out mentally, but his heart still thumps hard in his chest.

"The defendant is found not guilty on the charge of kidnapping. The defendant is also found not guilty on the charges of harassment, stalking and the physical assault of Min Yoongi and Jeon Jungkook as those have been proven to be cases of self defence in his own home."

Jimin squeezes his eyes shut. His stomach's wringing tight. So far, it's bad. Not entirely a surprise, but it bites in a way that still catches him off guard.

"However, the defendant is found guilty of multiple counts of physical assault and battery of Park Jimin, and will receive a 6 month sentence of prison time with probation. He is also found guilty for the non-consensual and illegal filming and distribution of explicit videos of him and his sexual partners, for which he will receive a 3 month sentence of prison time, 30 hours of community service, guided counselling, and 500,000 won in fines. All time spent in detention will also be eligible for early release depending on his behaviour. The defendant will also be sanctioned with a court-ordered restraining order basis which he is not to enter any area within a 5km radius of Park Jimin to prevent any further incidents in the future. That is the final verdict. Court dismissed."

It's silent before the murmurs start. Taehyung's….going to jail. Jimin's eyes are open now, and they're wide. Taehyung's going to jail. Not for long. It's just 9 months. He deserves years. It should be disappointing…and yet…

"I'm going to prison?" Taehyung yells. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

Jimin feels a hand on his shoulder, and he turns around to see Yoongi. He hugs his hyung. Taehyung continues to shout in the background, talking about how he should've received no time at all for the physical assault considering there are no laws about domestic violence in homosexual relationships, and why the lawyer didn't work harder to settle.

"It's done," Yoongi says, rubbing his back. His stitches were all taken out yesterday, and he's been cleared to resume with normal activity.

It feels like they're finally free. Jimin knows that it's not really true…and Taehyung's going to be back soon. He's eligible for early release. But…

Jimin jerks as there's a sudden burst of sound and voices, along with the loud noise of something falling over. He moves to turn before he's yanked forward by his collar, tugged so hard he flails over the prosecutor's desk. His body's dangled half off of the wood.

Jimin meets Taehyung's wild eyes. His heart lurches and he screams, blood-curdlingly loud. The guards dart forward, but they fail to pry him off Jimin.

"You think this is gonna get rid of me, huh?" Taehyung spits, his cuffed hands wound tightly in the soft yarn of Jimin's sweater. "I'm burrowed so deep inside of your brain you're never going to fucking forget me. When I'm out of here, I'm gonna be right at the edge of your bed again to take you home. You'll never escape me. You're mine-"

Taehyung's knocked off him, and Jimin sees splintering wood in the corner of his eye.

Yoongi darts forward, holding what looks to be the only surviving panel of wood from the chair he smashed against the side of Taehyung's head. He vaults himself over the prosecutor's desk and starts to punch Taehyung in the face. The other man stumbles but seems disoriented enough that Yoongi easily gets him on the ground. The people in the courtroom scream, there are raised voices yelling to call more security.

"You touch him, that puts me above the law," Yoongi spits, punching Taehyung so hard that his jaw breaks. The next punch slams against his nose. There are so many hits that it feels like it goes on forever. "You've made no impact. I'm fine. Jimin's happy. Jungkook's awake. Jimin's dating him again."

"N-No-" Taehyung growls, rising up. A guard attempts to pull Yoongi off him, but Yoongi knocks him off balance. Yoongi grabs Taehyung's bloodied face, skin split after he was hit with the chair. He sinks his hands into Taehyung's hair, and slams his head back onto the floor, the sound loud.

"Hyung!" Jimin screams.

"You gave my baby brother a concussion, right?" Yoongi asks nonchalantly. "I'm only returning the favour."

Yoongi looks around and seems to spot someone in the audience filming them. He smiles, and lifts Taehyung's bloody face so it shows up in the frame too.

“Hope this goes in the papers,” Yoongi says, smiling wider as he poses. Taehyung’s head lolls, nose leaking and head spewing blood like a broken faucet. He’s either unconscious or is on the way there. Yoongi’s pulled off him moments later, and handcuffs are strapped to his wrists.

“Hyung,” Jimin repeats. He’s shaking. He can’t process any of what’s happened.

“Don’t worry,” Yoongi says as he’s restrained. “We’ll be fine.”

If there’s one thing Yoongi is, it’s always being right. Jimin trusts him. He always has. So he tries to calm himself down as the guards escort him away, and Jimin watches as a new set arrives to assess Taehyung’s condition.

He’s mumbling something.

“J…Jimin..”

Taehyung’s looking right at him, and he extends his bound arms toward him.

“I l-love you. Don’t leave me.”

Jimin slaps a hand over his mouth, muffling a sob.

“Please don’t leave me…” he repeats.

The emotion Jimin feels in that moment makes him sick to his stomach. He turns around and flees the courtroom, his skin suddenly cold and his face pale. It feels like he’s on the cusp of passing out.

No…he can't feel…

Jimin heaves for breath, collapsing onto one of the benches outside. It feels like his vision is moving at a slower frame rate. What's happening to him? All that yelling…the blood…the violence. He's become too fragile. All together, it feels like it's doing him in.

It's over. It officially is. He can say it now. That he survived this.

But…

But.

-

When Jungkook finally comes home, Jimin's got the house all done up. He's tidied and freshened everything up, and spent a bulk of the day cooking his favourite things.

He's just about to set the table when the doorbell rings.

Jimin's heart skips a beat. He rushes to open the door, tummy swarming with butterflies once he sees Jungkook. He looks freshly showered, dressed in the clothes Jimin had dropped off in the hospital yesterday. They threw out the ones Jungkook was wearing when he was brought in, because Jimin doesn't want any overt memory of that day for him to see. Not anymore.

"Hi," Jungkook greets shyly. It reminds Jimin of the day Jungkook had first come to his room in the dorms, asking if he was still looking for a flatmate.

"Hi, baby," Jimin says, finally hugging him. He slots himself into Jungkook's arms, resting his head against his chest. He can feel Jungkook's thumping heart against his ear. "Welcome

home.”

Jungkook pulls away to gingerly drop the duffel bag he was carrying to the floor. He uses his now free hands to pull Jimin closer and tip his chin up for a sweet kiss.

Jimin sighs into it. It’s quiet save for the singing wind chimes. He raises his hands to hold Jungkook’s face, and he slumps into him when Jungkook deepens the kiss, strong hands firm on his waist.

Jungkook is warm again. His arms are strong and safe around him. Jimin feels dizzy being able to breathe in his natural scent, something he had to go so long without. He’s only just gotten home and Jimin already feels so much better.

Jungkook nips at his bottom lip, hands flexing on his waist, and Jimin feels a lick of heat in his belly. But what he also feels is a bout of dread that overpowers everything else.

Jimin pulls away. His hands slip off Jungkook’s face, skidding down his sturdy chest before they fall limply at his sides.

“Y-You must be hungry. We should eat,” he says brusquely, turning around.

“Hey,” Jungkook says, stopping him and tugging him lightly on the wrist. “I’m sorry. I think I did too much just now.”

“No,” Jimin responds immediately. “I…” he trails off.

Jungkook stares at him, looking nervous.

“Let’s eat first. Please? The food will get cold,” Jimin says instead. It’s almost pleading.

Jungkook's face falls slightly, but he nods. He lets go of Jimin’s wrist.

“Come sit,” Jimin says, gesturing to their little dining table. It’s small, but the whole surface is covered in different dishes and plates of food.

Jungkook listens, plopping down onto one of the two chairs. His eyes light up as he takes in all the food. If he were a puppy, his tail would have started thumping against the floor. The thought makes Jimin smile.

“Everything looks and smells amazing,” Jungkook praises. “Thank you, Jiminie.”

“Let’s hope it tastes good too,” Jimin quips, sitting down as well. Jungkook laughs lightly.

They eat then. Jungkook’s got a ravenous appetite, probably exacerbated by the fact that he’s only been able to eat boring hospital food for so long now. Since he’s completely okay, Jimin’s made sure to make plenty of things with spice that aren’t necessarily healthy, but satiate Jungkook’s cravings and mark a fresh start. Jungkook tears at the fried chicken with his teeth, leaning back into his chair with a content sigh with every bite of tender pork belly. He finally gets to have his fill of soy braised eggs and kimchi stew, and has several bowls of rice.

The more Jimin watches Jungkook enjoy his food, the more a deep satisfaction spreads through his mind, body and soul. Jungkook is healthy again. He is alive, and happy. He’s animated. Jimin has his eyes trained on his face, taking in the cute way his eyebrows furrow as he enjoys his food. He feels his heart swell, vision following his soft hands, his wide eyes, the little bit of kimchi that sticks to the edge of his mouth.

“Did Yoongi hyung get to Daejeon alright?”

“Yeah,” Jimin responds. “He reached last evening. He’s in the middle of settling back in.”

It was hard saying goodbye. Yoongi and him, they talked a lot the last few days.

“He should’ve stayed longer…” Jungkook says, dabbing at his mouth with a tissue. It looks like he’s finally done eating. “Why’d he leave so soon?”

Jimin gnaws at his bottom lip.

“Jungkook-ah,” he starts, voice timid. “There’s a lot that we need to talk about.”

Jungkook’s face falls immediately, the smile slipping off his lips. His eyes turn wide and anxious, and he sits up straighter in his chair.

“What?” He asks. “What is it?”

“Let me clear up first. I’ll meet you in the living room,” Jimin insists, standing up.

“I’ll clean up. You already-” Jungkook starts, standing up as well.

“No,” Jimin interjects, taking hold of Jungkook’s shoulders and nudging him out of their little kitchenette and dining room. “I’ll take care of it. You go sit.”

Jungkook stares at him, and his fingers scrunch up at his sides like he’s resisting the urge to touch him.

“I’ll be quick,” Jimin promises.

“Okay,” Jungkook relents, and leaves the kitchen.

Jimin worries his lip between his teeth as he clears the table of all the dishes. There are no leftovers, so he puts everything in the sink and gets to work on scrubbing all of the bowls and plates after he's done wiping down the table.

But soon, he's done with everything. Which means he has no choice but to face the music now, head-on.

Jimin takes off his little apron and dries off his wet hands with a kitchen towel. He then touches his own cheeks, feeling how hot they are against his icy cold fingertips.

Eventually, he forces himself out of the kitchen and to the living room, where Jungkook sits gingerly on the sofa. He straightens up once he sees Jimin, giving him a tight anxious smile. Jimin returns it, settling down next to him.

"Tell me," Jungkook pleads.

Jimin laughs wetly. His throat is heavy.

"What I am now…" he starts. "Is worse and smaller than the person I was back when we first met."

Jungkook furrows his eyebrows.

"What do you mean?"

Jimin sighs shakily.

"Anxious and terrified. Don't you remember? How I was back then," Jimin elaborates. "I would cry all night, and flinch at everything, and always be afraid."

“I remember. That’s not a problem, Jiminie,” Jungkook says. “After what you’ve been through, I don’t expect you to just go back to normal.”

“I know. I know you wouldn’t. But…” Jimin trails off, feeling the tears build in his eyes. “I feel like he’s deeper in my head than before. I feel unsafe in my own skin. My body and heart feel things that my mind doesn’t. I’m back…but I’m not. I’m not fully back. I feel like I’m still in his house,” Jimin sobs. “I’m dead inside.”

“Jimin-” Jungkook starts, reaching out to comfort him.

“I’m dead inside. And the only thing that makes me feel like I’m alive is…you,” Jimin reveals.

Jungkook shuts up then.

“But you don’t deserve half of me. I don’t even know if I’m half right now. I feel like a ghost of myself. It’s hard to put into words, but I feel like I’m just existing while life passes me by. Your game…was so beautiful. I realized that that’s how you see me. Someone magical. But, Jungkook, I’m not that person right now and I don’t know if I’ll ever be after what’s h-happened,” Jimin’s voice breaks, tears streaming down his cheeks.

“Jimin, don’t-”

“I want to come back p-properly. Before I come back to you,” Jimin reveals. “I need to become me again. You deserve someone who is whole, and that’s not me. Not right now.”

Jungkook’s crying too. He looks around the space, and only just seems to notice the suitcases by the door.

“A-Are you leaving?” He asks. “Where are you going? Jimin, hear me out-”

“I’m going away for a while. I j-just need to fix myself. I want to become the person you love,” Jimin says. “And there’s a lot I still feel guilty about.”

“Like what? You didn’t do anything wrong!” Jungkook exclaims, taking Jimin’s hand in his.

“I had sex with him, Jungkookie,” Jimin sobs then.

It’s out. It’s finally out. Jimin’s insides wring as he says it. What he knows he had to be honest about this entire time, weighing on his conscience like the heaviest burden.

Jungkook falls silent then.

It hurts.

“I…there’s no excuse for it. But I didn’t do it to hurt you, I would never,” Jimin says, furiously wiping away his tears. He pulls his hand out of Jungkook’s. “I tried to escape and he found out. He b-beat me up, and locked me in that box underground for hours. I spent forever in there choking on my own blood. It was so dark that I couldn’t see. I’d broken my ankle and my b-body hurt all over. When he finally took me out, I was so desperate for the comfort that he gave me that it just h-happened. It didn’t matter that he was the one who hurt me in the first place. I’d lost my mind. I had a psychotic break. I hardly remember any of it. I tried to kill myself the next morning when I’d realized what I’d done. What I did to you. In that moment it didn’t matter who he was, who I was, what had happened. All I c-cared about was not being alone in there anymore and the p-pain going away. I betrayed y-you. It’s unforgivable!”

Jungkook’s staring at him, his eyes wide. Jimin crumples under his gaze.

“I’m s-sorry. You do so much for me, and I betrayed you-”

Jungkook surges forward and hugs him. He hugs him so hard that the breath is squeezed out of Jimin’s lungs, and his back is pressed against the sofa.

“I’m so sorry you had to go through that,” Jungkook says, his voice shaking. “I won’t ever forgive myself for letting him take you. I can’t believe you went through so much pain. Jimin, you know that what happened wasn’t you cheating on me, right?”

Jimin’s silent. He feels small and frail in Jungkook’s embrace, and he’s reluctant to pull away.

“You had a psychological response to the trauma he put you through,” Jungkook says, slowly so Jimin can hear him. “He took advantage of the broken state he put you in. You were not in the mental capacity to make decisions but he was and did for you. The implications of that are why he’s in prison. I know you. You can’t make yourself the problem here in my eyes. I know you wouldn’t cheat on me. You would never. I can’t believe that you think you’re at fault here.”

Jimin cries. That’s all he feels he knows to do.

Jungkook pulls away then.

“I’m not certain about a lot. But what I am certain about is you,” he says, wiping Jimin’s tears away. “We’ll get through this together.”

Jungkook then reaches into the pocket of his hoodie and pulls out a little box. He tilts it towards Jimin and opens it.

“Oh, Jungkook,” Jimin sobs when he sees the ring.

It’s rose gold in a gorgeous intertwined design, glinting in the sunlight.

“It’s not a-an engagement ring, don’t worry. Not that I’m not ready or don’t want that,” Jungkook reveals. “This is a promise ring. I got it with my prize money. I’d booked it back when I first registered for the competition, and I picked it up yesterday. I love you, Jimin. I

always will. I won't let you give up on us because you think you're at fault here. I would understand completely if you felt differently about me now, but-"

"I don't!" Jimin responds, desperate for Jungkook to know. He's overwhelmed once more. "I love you."

"I love you too. Baby…if you need time…you can have as much of it as you want. I'm right here. I'll always be right here, waiting for you," Jungkook promises, lifting Jimin's face up with a finger underneath his chin. "I don't want you thinking that you're not good enough for me just because you're recovering from a nightmare that I couldn't protect you from. You're unbelievably strong to have survived that in the first place."

"It's not going to be easy," Jimin sobs. "What if I don't get better?"

"I'll still be by your side. You seem to think I just want a sunny version of you, but you know that's not true. I love you now and I always will. I love everything about you," Jungkook confesses. "That'll never change."

Jimin stays silent. He doesn't know what to say, or what to do. Jungkook has defeated him. Jimin has laid his soul out bare, but Jungkook sees all of his sharp edges and embraces him all the same. It's the rawest form of love he's ever felt from anyone except his hyung.

"I just got you back," Jungkook whispers then. "I don't want to lose you."

Jimin sits there, his chest heaving.

"Do you believe me?" Jungkook asks.

"...Yes," Jimin responds. Because he does. Jungkook doesn't lie.

Jungkook sags, and he leans forward to hug him, pulling him into his chest. Jimin takes heavy breaths, exhaling in waves over Jungkook's hoodie. He feels a kiss being pressed to the side of his head.

"I'm yours," Jungkook says. "I've always been yours, and I always will be."

Jimin leans up and presses a tender kiss to Jungkook's lips, although it's mostly salty due to the way he's crying. Jungkook holds him with safe arms, and they trade sweet sticky kisses that make Jimin's head spin. It almost feels like it's a regular day after class, the both of them tangled deepy in each other., no hurry to stop, nowhere to go.

Jimin doesn't want to pull away, so he doesn't.

His head tips back as Jungkook instinctively dips low to press hot kisses and mouth wetly down the line of his neck, large hands holding him securely round the waist. Jimin's breathing is wavering and peaky, coming out in soft hot puffs. His eyes are half lidded and glazed over, his body slackening at how good it feels, how sensitive he is. His small hands tremble where they rest on Jungkook's sturdy shoulders.

Jungkook pulls away, and looks up at him. His eyes are glazed over too, a pretty blush dusted across his cheekbones. His freckles stand out like a beautiful constellation.

"You…" Jungkook starts softly. "You are the most beautiful person I have ever seen in my entire life. Even in my dreams. Every time I see you…my heart just…no matter how long we've been together, it's never enough, my heart just…" he trails off, breathless. "All I wanted was to have you back."

Jimin's eyes sting with tears as he stares down at him, coddled in his lap. He brings his hands up to cradle Jungkook's swelteringly hot cheeks.

This…this is what he's always wanted, Jimin thinks. Love like this. Something like this. He can feel it dancing around them and wrapping them up in it, like a warm cocoon. It fills up his lungs and courses through his veins.

He leans down and presses his forehead to Jungkook’s, noses bumping.

“I love you,” he says.

Jungkook takes in a shaky breath, and Jimin dips down to kiss him once more. They’re pressed so close that you can’t tell where one of them ends and the other begins. Jimin feels swallowed up in his love, and cherishes the way he can feel Jungkook’s heartbeat against his. It’s thundering and he’s running so hot you’d think he had a fever, eyes dazed as they gaze up at Jimin.

“We should stop…” Jungkook whispers in between kisses. “I’m-”

Jimin knows. He can feel the prominent bulge underneath him.

But, he’s not scared. Jungkook is different. His body recognizes him as safe. Jungkook, even now, manages to write over what he’s failed so far to bury.

“It’s okay,” Jimin says.

“No, I don’t want you to feel like we should-” Jungkook starts, trying to pull away. “You need time to-”

“All I need is you,” Jimin answers.

“Jimin…” Jungkooks says.

“I want to.”

He does. He wants to. He wants Jungkook to touch him, to make him feel new. To erase and paint over the last time he was touched like this. Just like he did the time before, when Jimin had broken for the first time. He made Jimin feel whole. It shouldn't make sense, but it does. His body yearns. It yearns for the singular comfort that only Jungkook can give him. Jimin wants to feel that again…

"Jimin," Jungkook repeats, and it seems now like he's just trying to feel Jimin's name coat his tongue. "I love you."

Jimin whimpers. Something swells in his heart.

He tugs at the hem of Jungkook's sweatshirt. Jungkook leans back and pulls it off, and Jimin's eyes widen. His stomach drops. The room feels colder all of a sudden.

Before, Jungkook's skin was soft, unblemished and smooth.

Now….he's got scars all over. The stab wounds. There's the jarring one on his neck, but the deep one on his chest and the several ones in his abdomen…they stick out sorely. These aren't the type to go away with time either.

Jimin sobs. The tears spill out.

"I'm sorry," he whispers.

Jungkook's body is ruined. Because of him.

"I'm proud to have them," Jungkook promises, eyes boring imploringly into his. "You have nothing to say sorry for. I got you back because of them. They're worth the world to me."

He cups Jimin's cheeks, and swipes his tears away with his thumbs, catching the salty drops and banishing them to a place where they don't cut as deeply.

“I’m proud,” Jungkook repeats. “Plus…it makes me look all rugged and handsome, don’t you think? Like I have a dangerous and mysterious past.”

Jimin laughs wetly then, swatting at Jungkook’s chest.

“I’m like your warrior,” Jungkook continues, eyes sparkling, latching greedily onto Jimin’s little giggle and chasing it. “Your noble steed. Always ready to protect you and make you happy.”

“Stop it,” Jimin laughs, leaning forward and pressing his head to Jungkook’s shoulder. He hugs him tightly, wrapping his arms around him. Jungkook pulls his face up and kisses him deeply.

It’s a haze after that. Jimin’s clothes glide off of him with Jungkook’s gentle hands, and he wants to sob with relief when he feels their heartbeats pressed together. The skin-to-skin contact makes him want to sing - because it’s all he would think of for comfort while he was trapped, and while Jungkook was in recovery. When he’d be able to feel this again. Warm, soft…and heavenly.

Jungkook’s fingers feel like they’re leaving trails of starlight in their wake as they trace over his sensitive skin. Jimin shudders underneath his touch, feeling the way his body temperature is shooting up to levels that aren't normal. It always feels new.

He inhales sharply as Jungkook secures his arms underneath his bottom and lifts him up, carrying the both of them to their bedroom.

“Careful-” Jimin gasps, scrabbling at his shoulders for purchase.

“I’m all healed up, Jiminie,” Jungkook responds easily. He carries him like he's featherlight, weightless. “Nothing to be careful about anymore.”

In a second, Jimin feels soft sheets against his highly sensitive back, and the feeling of Jungkook looming over him. Jimin gently takes hold of his face and presses his lips to his, spreading his legs so Jungkook can slot himself in between.

Jungkook pulls away and kisses down his chest, his fingers intertwined with Jimin's as he does. Jimin's breathing is choppy and peaking, and he trembles, crying out as Jungkook's lips brush against his nipple. The touch feels electric, making his back arch.

"P-Please-" Jimin begs. He feels desperate. "Please."

He wants to feel it. He needs to feel it. He needs to feel Jungkook consume him. It's weird. He shouldn't be wanting this, a cruel voice in his head says. He's nasty for wanting this so soon after everything that's happened, especially in the wake of the sins he's committed. Someone who has been through what he has - how could he be so wantonly desperate for something so illicit? What's wrong with him?

But the vicious thoughts fall into the recesses of his mind - passive as the dominant sense of his proximity to Jungkook washes over everything. He doesn't have the capacity to criticize and viciously tear himself down in the moment, the way he has so abundantly in the past while. Jungkook is much too distracting, always has been. He's grateful for the reprieve.

Jimin opens his eyes that were screwed shut, watching the way Jungkook reaches into the bedside drawer. He closes his eyes once more, suddenly much too bashful to watch him, reaching out to rest his hands on whatever bit of Jungkook he can feel, and focus on that. He can hardly hear the sound of a bottle opening amidst the thundering of his heart, and the sounds of his own shaky breathing.

"Baby?" Jungkook asks.

"Mm," Jimin whines, clinging to him.

"You're sure," he says. "You are, right?"

“Yes,” Jimin breathes. He’s desperate, parched. He wants it. He wants his mind to unravel like a spool of yarn. He wants to feel this, because the familiar sensations and feelings could trick his mind into thinking that it’s just another day - and that nothing has happened in the time since they were together like this last. It’s some form of magic that only Jungkook is capable of.

Jimin feels Jungkook’s slick fingers drift down the back of his thigh. He can feel himself tense with anticipation. His core feels hot and throbbing, painfully empty.

A single fleeting touch to his rim has him gasping, something pulsing needily inside of him. He clutches onto Jungkook tighter, sighing once he feels Jungkook press his lips to his pulse point. The other man sucks the skin lightly, worrying it gently between his teeth.

And then, he pushes his finger in. The moment it breaches him, Jimin's world starts to tilt.

He feels like he’s melting into a puddle, slowly turning into a honeyed mess that’ll drip over the sheets and spill off the bed in one sticky, hot mass. He’s having trouble catching his breath.

Jungkook’s lips find his, and Jimin’s fingers knot into his hair, his other hand holding his shoulder for purchase. Everything feels too hot.

One finger turns into two. Two turns into three. And Jimin’s losing count, gasping everytime Jungkook’s gentle loving fingers find a home in his most tender crevice. Jungkook swallows up his aborted breaths, kissing away the overwhelmed tears that roll down his swelteringly hot cheeks. He slides his fingers into him deftly yet still gentle, taking great care to stretch him out properly. Jimin's body feels loose and pliable in response to the ministrations, and he cries out every time Jungkook jabs into his prostate, an action that makes him jerk and skip a breath, a feeling so good he couldn't describe it.

Ever so often, Jungkook will nudge their noses together, a nonverbal way of checking in. Jimin greedily breathes in his natural scent, inhaling it deeply.

Jungkook pulls away, and their lips break apart.

Jimin opens his eyes, his fuzzy vision focusing on the sight of Jungkook above him.

His eyes are glazed over, a hot, pretty blush dusted over his nose and cheekbones, his ears fiery red. His lips are red and slick, kiss-swollen. His soft hair is tousled wispily by Jimin's fingers.

"You're so beautiful," Jimin whispers, reaching up to touch his face.

Jungkook inhales shakily.

"Jimin," he says, his eyes growing wet as he stares back at him, like he's seeing him for the first time. "Jimin," he repeats.

"I'm here," Jimin answers, pulling him back in and hugging him tightly. Jungkook's chest trembles against his, and he holds him tight, snaking his arms around his small frame to return the embrace. The other man's tears fall against his skin.

Time passes sweet and slow after that. Everything feels diffused as Jungkook sits up, and presses himself to Jimin. The mere contact and direct pressure against his hole make him whine.

Jungkook slides into him, making him gasp wetly. Jimin's fingers fist into the sheets, trembling as he feels Jungkook gently push his way inside of him. Everything is hot.

They've made love before - but it feels different now. It's obvious why - it's been so long, and so much has happened. But there's something in the feeling of Jungkook claiming him like this, being inside of him, blanketing him with his body that carries more weight than it has in the past.

He feels like he’s glowing, the dizzying pleasure seeping into every pore of his skin. Jungkook’s breathing is heavy too.

When he’s in completely, Jimin shudders. He’s so full he thinks he may burst. There are goosebumps all over his body, and he’s aware of his wet cheeks cooling against the air. He's trembling, his chest heaving.

Jungkook’s perfectly still, giving him time to adjust. He kisses him in the meantime, fingers combing through his hair, resting against his feverish forehead. They keep touching each other whichever way they can - because they can't bear not to.

“I love you,” Jungkook tells him, holding him like he’s precious.

Jimin shudders. He doesn’t think he deserves this.

“P-Please,” Jimin whimpers.

Jungkook pulls back, and thrusts in shallowly. Jimin’s back arches, mouth dropping open in a silent moan. He throws an arm around Jungkook’s broad back, using his other hand to cup his neck, pulling him closer.

Jungkook’s pace is careful at the start, tentative. His skin is running so hot you’d think he has a fever. He drives into Jimin slowly, tipping his chin up with a firm thumb and kissing him deeply.

They don’t talk. They’re so in tune with each other that words feel unnecessary - Jungkook just understands what he wants and needs. Jimin can read him just as well, holding him closer whenever Jungkook hints at it with his body. The instinctual need to be together, to feel each other rises above all else.

Soon, Jimin can barely catch a breath. Jungkook drives into him so hard that he jerks on each upsweep, his back arching. He can feel the way his cock drags wetly against Jungkook’s abs,

and he cries out when he feels Jungkook reach a calloused fist down to take hold of him.

It’s too much for Jimin - so much pleasure from both ends. His moans are peaky but he feels no embarassment. His rim aches, craving more and more. Jungkook is so deep inside of him that it overwhelms him and he feels drool leak from his mouth, eyes hazy and rolling into the back of his head. The repeated movements of his thrusts, the feeling of his rim catching, clinging deliciously to Jungkook - it serves to drive him insane. There's a sweet, dull ache building deep within his body.

And with his closed eyes - every sensation is magnified tenfold. The sweat and tears cooling on his skin, the heat of Jungkook’s body. His heavy length throbs inside him, stretching beyond what should be possible. The weight of him over him, claiming him. Jimin feels safe under him, sighing once he feels Jungkook’s soft lips descend upon his once more.

He gives into the feeling. Jimin’s head falls back onto the pillow, his hair fanning out around him like a halo. Jungkook follows, dipping his head down to kiss the sensitive spot just underneath his ear. Jimin cries out, eyebrows twinging as Jungkook’s cock repeatedly hits the same electric spot deep inside of him.

He aches. He aches with want despite having it all. Jungkook teases him with his free hand.

Jungkook’s breathing is choppy. It echoes in Jimin's ears. His pace starts to devolve into a choppy madness - hard and deep, no particular pattern or rhythmn. Jimin chokes on every breath, little balls of white bursting underneath his eyelids. It feels so good he could die, waves of ecstasy pummelling through him with every thrust.

The pleasure within Jimin keeps building, a honeyed sweetness drowning him further and further. Jungkook’s thrusts start to lose their focused pace even further, and all it takes is one particularly hard thrust for Jimin to come undone.

His back arches and he cries out, the tight coil within him snapping and bathing his vision white. His nerves burn bright, skin searingly hot. He scrabbles at Jungkook’s muscled back, mouth dropped open as the heavenly, drug-like high seems to stretch on for forever. The space between their tummies is wet with his release, and he contracts wildly around Jungkook’s length.

“F-Fuck, Jimin,” Jungkook whines. He holds him tighter, chasing his own release too. Jimin caresses his back, going cross eyed and jerking up the bed with every hard thrust.

It’s just moments later that Jungkook reaches his peak too, and Jimin feels his warmth bloom satisfyingly inside him. Jungkook kisses away Jimin’s tears, hugging him once more, holding him like he’s fragile.

Jimin’s eyes close then, and he brings his arms up to hug Jungkook back. They stay like that for what feels like hours. He falls asleep for a while, his face pressed to Jungkook’s chest and his arms wrapped tightly around his middle. How could he be so lucky? To get his second chance for the umpteenth time.

When they pull away eventually, just as the sun hangs low in the sky as twilight tides its way over, Jimin gives Jungkook his hand.

The message is clear. The ring is slid onto his finger, and they spend the rest of the night intertwined until…it’s time.

He showers and gets dressed in silence, Jungkook watching him silently.

“I’ll come back,” Jimin says.

Jungkook nods. He steps forward and takes his face in his hands, staring tenderly into Jimin’s eyes before he leans in for a kiss. It’s soft, and syrupy sweet, and Jimin has to resist pressing in closer once they break apart. He stares up at Jungkook, and lets himself have another kiss.

After that, Jimin pulls away. Lingering will only make it harder.

Jimin picks up his bag and walks out of the apartment. He doesn’t look back.

Jimin buys himself a bottle of chilled water at the convenience store down the road. He takes the bus, and gets down a stop earlier just so he can feel the breeze against his skin as he walks the final stretch to the train station. He feels untethered and free. The weight that's been boring down onto his chest has eased slightly. Ever so often, he makes sure to touch the ring Jungkook gave him, relishing the way it makes his heart bloom. Sensations that cut through everything else that's morose.

He feels…optimistic. No, that's not the right word. Perhaps the best way of putting it is that Jimin can't really see which way his life is going to go now, from this point onward. Before, all he could see was despair. But how, he just doesn't know. He hasn't a single clue.

Jimin's going to have to repeat the year at university. Which means he has several months before he has to return to Seoul for when the academic year starts. His hyung helped him book a train ticket to a coastal town he's never been to before, where he's secured a job as a part time worker at a noodle restaurant. Jimin's even got a cosy little room that he's going to stay in. His plan is to shuttle in between cities, embroil himself in new experiences, and hope that somewhere along the way he manages to find himself once more. So that he becomes whole.

Jimin's new phone rings.

It's not a smartphone, rather one of the older ones with the buttons and analogue screen. It can send texts and make calls. That's all Jimin needs. And also, he needs to save up to be able to buy a nicer phone if he wants one now. His family did offer to buy one for him, but Jimin wants to do it himself.

"Hello?" He answers.

"Hey, Jiminie," Yoongi's drawl is comfortingly familiar. *"How did it go?*"

"It w-went okay," Jimin responds meekly. " 't was hard."

"You'll both be fine."

After the big scuffle at the courtroom, both of them were surprised to find that Yoongi wasn't in serious trouble. Not major trouble at the very least. He had to pay a hefty fine for the disruption, but the rest of it was considered self defense as Taehyung had grabbed Jimin first, the guards failing to incapacitate him themselves. Or perhaps the judge finally managed to spare them a smattering of pity.

Yoongi stayed for a while. And then Jimin told him about what he was thinking, about his relationship with Jungkook and his potential plans for the future. Yoongi, as usual, gave him the emotional strength he needed to go through with it. He'd insisted on staying while Jimin talked things out with Jungkook in case he needed him, but Jimin also knew that Yoongi needed to get back to his life in Daejeon. He'd been gone for far too long. It was a sad realization and reminder that they were no longer sharing the same space as they used to when they were kids, now having built their own lives.

But of course, Yoongi wouldn't agree. He only listened when Jimin told him about his plan, and promised that he'd come stay with his hyung in Daejeon for a while at some point. Jimin's life has stopped and is still in a standstill, but he doesn't want the same for his hyung or Jungkook, both of whom have countless commitments and initiatives they've paved for their futures. Jimin can't stand the thought of derailing their lives more than he already has. But he would never tell them that, because they'd never agree.

They parted ways tearfully. Jimin felt like he'd lost a thick layer of safety.

There is nothing in this world that you cannot tell me. I'm always on your side, Yoongi had told him before boarding the bus. They'd hugged for longer than he could keep track of, Jimin sobbing into his neck. *You don't have to be scared as long as I'm here.*

That was a day and a half ago. Just in time for Jungkook coming home, something Jimin knew he had to do by himself. A step of bravery. He was scared that he wouldn't be able to go through with it. But he has.

"Is your train on time?"

“Yes, I think so. I’m just a few minutes away from the station. I’ll head there and check myself.”

“I should’ve been there to see you off at the very least-”

“I’ll be fine, hyung.”

“...”

“No more secrets,” Jimin says, also a promise.

“No more secrets,” Yoongi reluctantly agrees. *“Call me once you find out about your train.”*

“I will.”

“Bye, Jiminie. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Jimin ends the call then, pocketing his clunky phone. He silently walks the few hundred metres left in his journey to the train station, his belongings trailing behind him in a little suitcase, wheels bouncing off the cobblestone. The cold is bordering on unwelcome, and Jimin reminds himself to take one of his scarves out of his bag and wrap himself in it once he arrives at the station.

Five minutes later, he’s trudging through the entrance. There is some bustle, but not as much as there usually is during rush hour.

Jimin scans his ticket that he'd nervously kept ready at the entrance of the station, sighing with relief once the automated gates let him through. He eyes the signs that tell him which platform his train is scheduled to arrive at, and follows them wide-eyed. He's 30 minutes early.

He finds it soon enough. It's sparsely crowded which isn't surprising considering it's an odd time of day in the middle of the week, and not exactly a popular destination. Not many people travelling to a remote coastal town.

Jimin just sees an elderly woman waiting with a cart of empty boxes, ones which evidently carried lots of homemade kimchi she would've come to Seoul to drop off for a loved one. There's a tired looking businessman too, engrossed in his phone. And then there's a man clad in a plaid shirt reading a book on one of the benches, a baseball cap obscuring his face.

It's quiet. Peaceful, save for the sounds of the automatic train announcements on the intercom. Jimin sits down on an empty bench, stretching out his legs and staring at his sneakers. He takes out his scarf and wraps it around himself justas he wanted to. Then, he fiddles with his ring, fingers tracing the smooth band of it, wondering once again how he could ever be so lucky. His heart flutters.

Jimin suddenly feels rather thirsty. He stands, heading over to the little minimart on the platform.

He picks up a few bottles of water. Even a simple sandwich and a carton of chilled barley tea.

The clerk begins to scan his items. Jimin waits patiently, his eyes drifting over the rest of the shop.

His heart stops.

Something in Jimin's chest shrivels up, his eyes starting to burn. He walks closer to the magazine stand that caught his attention.

There's a magazine targeted towards teen girls in the front row. It's got a collage of flashy Kpop idols on the cover, some other headlines too. Quite an eye-catching piece.

But, Jimin's eyes are drawn to the little plastic packet stuck to every copy. Inside each packet is a ring.

The same ring Taehyung got him all those years ago on Valentine's Day. It feels like centuries ago.

But Jimin still remembers. He'll always remember.

The shock sits damp and heavily in his stomach, his skin suddenly feeling oversensitive. This is the ring Taehyung said he'd spent ages picking it out for him. He probably just plucked it off a magazine just like this…

Jimin's head starts to spin. He can hardly register the clerk at the cashier talking to him. It happens too quickly. There are tears streaming down his cheeks, and his vision becomes hazy. He suddenly feels too weak, and it feels like his world is closing in on itself.

He feels so *stupid*. He's felt it so many times before. But now…it's a small yet achingly painful addition that's just enough to finally break him. Jimin treasured that ring. He spent days staring at it and failing to suppress the fluttering of his heart, feeling so loved as he imagined Taehyung choosing and buying this for him. It's still carefully stored in a box in Jimin's bedroom back home.

It was all a lie. Just like everything else. A sharp pain starts to bore down onto his chest, threatening to crush his ribcage. Something in his throat pulls low.

Jimin begins to sob. The wounds are fresh. His breathing is short and sparse. His knees wobble. It hurts just as much as it always does, and then more. It hurts infinitely more, even more than when Taehyung hit him for the first time, and when Jimin found out he'd betrayed him.

Jimin realizes in that moment that the heartbreak is never going to ease. It runs too deep, etched into the fabric of his spirit. He's never going to recover from this the way he wants to, and hopes he will. Not when reminders of Taehyung's false love still have him dangling by the strings of his soul, cutting so sharp he just might bleed out. The effect he's had on him is too much to simply disappear.

It's unbearable, the way he feels at that moment. His heart weeps.

Jimin stumbles out of the minimart, feeling hysterical. He's panting, sobbing so hard his body shakes.

It feels like the cruellest trick ever played on him.

And Jimin just wonders…what's the point? What's the point of any of this, if this is what's reality? What's the point of Jungkook working so hard on that game and spending his cash prize on a symbol of love, or Yoongi sacrificing months of his life for him? What's the point of Taehyung going to prison, or the restraining order? What's the point of Jimin making this effort to move and travel to recover? What's the point? Jimin still isn't better…and the weight of it all is too scary. He feels terrified and alone. He's still hurt, still broken from what Taehyung has inflicted on him.

Jimin walks, not really able to see or really focus on where he's going or what's in front of him. He doesn't know where his suitcase is. He feels the way he felt when he was locked in that little box underneath Taehyung's house, dizzy and disoriented. His vision vignettes around the corners, and he feels his mind start to crumble.

"Hey-" he hears distantly. "Hey, stop!"

Jimin's on steady ground, and then he's suddenly not.

All he registers is falling, and his knees slamming into something hard. His body flails forward, head colliding with what feels like rubble and metal. Jimin moans in pain as he feels

the ground beneath him begin to shake. Floodlights blare into the side of his face, just as the sounds of an approaching train grow louder.

He…he's on the tracks.

Jimin doesn't have the time or energy to comprehend it or move his body into action. He feels tired and resigned, and for a moment, grateful.

But it doesn't last long.

Jimin feels a heavy thump on the ground next to him.

He feels arms wind around his body and grab him, and then he's pressed into a chest. There's some struggling and Jimin's jostled this way and that, but he feels the way the person holding him moves fast to get them both off the tracks.

There's a steep climb and some grunting before they both collapse onto safe and steady ground, and Jimin feels the whoosh of wind from the arriving train blow against his wet face just seconds later as it pulls into the platform.

"Shit, that was close," he hears amidst the sounds of heavy panting. "Hey, can you hear me?"

Jimin's so tired. He just sobs, his chest heaving where he lies on the cold dusty ground. His knees ache.

Every time he thinks he's reached the end, something stops him. First it was his hyung. The second time was Taehyung. And now…

"Hey," the person nudges him gently. "Please let me know you're okay. Just make a sound, anything."

He has a deep, comforting voice.

Jimin's eyes crack open. His skin feels tacky, and there's definitely a few cuts or scratches on his forehead. He realizes he's looking up at the man who was reading earlier, the one with the plaid shirt. He has tan skin and kind eyes.

"I'm o-okay," he sobs, if only to reassure the kind stranger he's mortified to have inconvenienced.

The other man laughs slightly.

"You don't look okay," he responds. "I want to say that you accidentally fell. But I know that that's not the case."

Jimin looks away, ashamed. He's not sure how to respond to that. It's true but it's not. He was in a place where his body acted in isolation of his mind, but he can't quite say that he wasn't looking for it to end. He would've embraced any outcome.

"But at least you're physically okay," the other man says. "My name is Namjoon, by the way."

"You're g-gonna miss the train," Jimin points out. "I'm fine. Just get on."

"Oh, I can just catch the next one," Namjoon says casually, shrugging. "And so can you. But let's have a chat. I think we should talk."

"You don't even know me," Jimin answers as he sniffles, attempting to sit up. He should feel uneasy, this man's a total stranger. But right now he feels unfamiliar yet still safe somehow. There are a number of things that are keeping Jimin on edge right now, but his presence isn't one of them.

“Do I have to?” Namjoon asks, standing and then helping him up. Jimin’s knees ache, but he’s able to keep himself upright.

He stays silent, not sure how to respond.

“Let’s head out,” Namjoon says.

They leave the station, not before both of them check their suitcases into storage lockers for them to collect when it’s time to board the next train. Namjoon buys two tickets for the next one that leaves in 5 hours, and Jimin tries to give him the cash for it which he doesn’t take.

They head to the little parking area outside the station, where Namjoon unlocks an expensive looking bicycle. Jimin stands a few feet away, feeling meek and small. He’s still crying, but he’s at the very least feeling somewhat sane now. He can see what’s in front of him and make sense of his surroundings.

“Let’s go to the river. It’s just fifteen minutes away.”

“I d-don’t know,” Jimin starts.

Namjoon leads his bicycle out of the slot, getting on and patting the little seat behind him. He’s quite large, Jimin realizes, as he sees how his broad frame appears on the slim bicycle. Not intimidating though, not in the slightest. Something about him reminds Jimin of a puppy, and his dimples shine as he smiles.

“The fresh air will be good for you. Hop on.”

Jimin reluctantly gets on.

The bicycle ride does wonders for how he feels. His heartbeat starts to slow down. It's cold, but the breeze is welcome against his exposed skin. It runs through his hair, and wipes his tears away for him. Jimin stares at the starry sky and tall buildings and trees, all the people who they pass. They laugh and chat. They even ride by a few food stalls, plenty of friends and couples eating and drinking together.

The city seems to teem with life.

Jimin breathes in, relishing the way the oxygen fills up his lungs and flows out smoothly with each exhale. His breathing starts to even out. His fists tighten in the shy grip they have on the hem of Namjoon's shirt. He finds himself smiling just slightly.

Namjoon stops on the way, slowing down in front of a convenience store. He enters and returns in record time, a little plastic carrier in his grasp. And then they're off again.

Jimin stares at the way the glow from the street lights bounces off the ring on his finger. Luckily, it doesn't seem to be scratched up, even if Jimin is.

While Taehyung got him a fake meaningless ring on an important day, Jungkook got him the most precious one. He worked hard for it, yet another sharp contrast to his time with Taehyung, and it should fill the gaping hole in Jimin's soul. But still, he bleeds.

Namjoon's true to his word. Fifteen minutes later, he slows to a stop at a small patch of lawn before the railing of the river. Jimin admires his stamina, he would've been panting by now.

Namjoon gets off his bicycle and kicks the stand in place, helping Jimin off it. Jimin feels overwhelmed, his eyes wide and mouth quivering. The breeze is even stronger here.

"Let's sit." Namjoon suggests.

Jimin complies awkwardly, lowering himself to the grass. His eyes are red-rimmed and they burn, and he still feels tremors shaking their way up his spine. His hands are ice cold.

Namjoon sits down next to him, a polite distance away yet close enough that they'd be able to hear each other clearly. He opens up the little plastic carrier from the convenience store, and pulls out two water bottles.

He hands one to Jimin.

“I have some snacks too, but let’s start with water first. It’ll help you calm down,” he says.

“Thank you,” Jimin says quietly, taking it gratefully. He uncaps the bottle and takes a sip, feeling the way the cool liquid makes its way through his body.

They sit in silence for about a minute. The moon hangs high in the sky, and Jimin watches the surface of the river rippling ever so gently with the slight breeze. A few other people on bicycles zoom past them, and Seoul’s metropolis glitters like a million stars.

“I can’t say I know what you’re going through,” Namjoon starts. Jimin turns to look at him, eyes red. “But I felt like my life was over a year ago.”

“What happened?” Jimin asks quietly.

“My girlfriend cheated on me. I thought she was…the one. The funny thing is, I still do,” Namjoon confesses, his face serious and blank. “I met her by chance. I was attending a popup art exhibition that happened to be hers. She was evidently nervous and I struck up a conversation…and it was as easy as that. I was in love. We dated for two years, and I was the happiest I’d ever been. I thought she was my soulmate, we just felt so connected. And then… she broke my heart. I was lost. My heart was shattered to bits. Living felt like a chore. She cheated on me with my childhood best friend, so it was even worse. I don’t speak to either of them anymore.”

“I’m so sorry,” Jimin says. He does know how it feels. Exactly how. He wants to rest a hand on Namjoon’s shoulder, comfort him. But he feels too shy to, given they’re still technically strangers.

“I genuinely felt like my life was over. I’d planned the next few years around our relationship. And now that it was gone, I felt lost. Abandoned. What was the point of doing anything? All I did was cry,” Namjoon says. “It broke me in a way I wasn’t sure I could ever recover from. I felt unworthy of love. Not good enough. Like any possible happiness was suddenly stolen from my world and future.”

“Do you hate her?” Jimin asks quietly. He needs to know.

“No…” Namjoon responds. “That’s the thing. I could never hate her. You can’t truly hate someone you’ve loved before. At least I couldn’t, not with how much I loved her. I tried to, but I eventually stopped. I can’t force myself to feel a certain way. It drained me, the need to blame and punish someone, something, *anything*, for my pain. But it was pointless, and harmful to me in the long run. Our bodies take time to unlearn things, especially when they run so deep. She wasn’t thinking about me. My best friend wasn’t thinking about me. Why should I hurt myself too, keeping painful memories of people who have hurt me to foster even more poisonous negativity? It creates darkness in your life. All I can do is move and look forward. My emotions are out of my control. What I can control is what I do next…and hope that somewhere along the way it stops hurting as much.”

Jimin thinks. He doesn’t have to hate Taehyung. The fact that he can’t doesn’t seem so terrifying anymore. He digs his feet into the grass, the breeze flowing through his hair. The tip of his nose is flushed red.

“But…time did its thing. I can’t say the usual stuff like I’ve met someone new and discovered the true meaning of love because I haven’t. But I’ve learned how to feel alive again, by myself. I’ve found a new meaning for it. It’s by doing little things like this. Going on bike rides. Meeting strangers. Feeling the wind against your skin. The texture of your favourite food, the fur of a dog you pet, exchanging smiles with people you pass on the street. Small things that make you realize that there’s so much more to living than what you’ve been through. It’s all so big, larger than we’ll ever know. And that life goes on. No matter what. You just have to catch the bus and go with it. You can’t let them win.”

“Has it stopped hurting?”

“No,” Namjoon says. “It does. It always will, I think. But it’s not as glaring as it used to be. It’s just become part of a collection of moments that have made me who I am today. Not the most important part. I won’t let it become what defines me. There’s so much more to my life.

And what I've also come to terms with is the fact that what happened is not a reflection of me, but of them. I'm not unloveable. And even if I am, all I can do is continue to be kind and hope that I meet someone who can and will love me."

"You're not unloveable," Jimin says, sniffling. It feels like fate, him meeting Namjoon tonight. He brings his hands up to wipe his tears.

"And neither are you," Namjoon responds before he pauses. "I never got your name."

"It's Jimin. Sorry," Jimin sniffles.

"Don't apologize. I'm glad we met, Jimin."

"Me too."

They sit in silence for a little while longer.

"My boyfriend also cheated on me," Jimin eventually confesses. "He hit me too. But I managed to leave him and find love again. Real, proper love. It wasn't easy but I made it. But then he forced his way back into my life again, damaged me further, and I'm not sure I have the strength to stitch myself back together again."

He wipes at his eyes, bringing his knees up and burying his face into them. He wraps his arms around himself.

"Why not?" Namjoon asks.

Jimin looks up, peeking.

“Hmm?”

“Why can’t you stitch yourself back together?”

“I feel like I’m worn too thin. I could salvage the pieces back then, but I feel like this time around I’m spread too far apart to be put back together. You saw me back at the station. I was hysterical just because I was reminded of him.”

“But is that the only meaning in your life? Is what he put you through the only thing you can feel?”

“I-”

“Maybe, now, it is. Maybe it will be for the next several months or even a year. Setbacks are always normal. But your life is always so much more. Soon, you’ll be able to have conversations like this with me, or eat something or feel joy without the poison being as potent anymore. You’ll be able to feel other things, and they’ll become louder than this because it’s all in your past. It’s not in front of you anymore. Time will fix it. You’ve done it before. You can do it again. There are so many other things you need to live to feel and experience. Good and bad. That’s why I was travelling to the coast, to see as much as I can and feel everything. Life is short. It’s about whether you’re willing to give up on what else is around you and waiting for you.”

Jimin finds his vision drifting to the ring. He touches it, feeling the way his heart swells. Tears spring to his eyes, and he smiles, thinking of Jungkook’s warm smiles and soft skin. He thinks about how safe he feels in Jungkook’s arms, and how he always wants more. He wants to know what their future looks like. He wants him for the rest of his life, to cherish and protect. He wants to marry him. He thinks about his hyung, their unbreakable bond that he wants to see through for forever to come, as they grow older. He wants to see his hyung successful, wants to be able to look at him and feel that pride.

Most of all, Jimin wants to feel it for himself. He wants to feel pride on his graduation day. He wants to feel more of his crochet needle, wants to get back into sketching. He wants to try skiing, and he wants to spend more nights by the coast. He wants to cuddle lots of puppies and kittens, fall asleep while reading, sing at karaoke bars at the top of his lungs. He wants to taste *life*. He still wants to. Despite everything. He’s thirsty for it.

It all feels possible. For the very first time.

He can't guarantee what life has in store for him. But what he can do is…keep wanting to live. Keep building things to feel and live for. There's too much for him to leave behind.

They spend a long time there, both of them. Jimin lays down, his back and head cradled by the swaying grass. He feels the wind flow through his hair, embracing him. He can hear the flowing of the river, and Namjoon's calm breathing next to him. He can feel the moonlight bathing his skin and the rustling of the trees around him. He feels Jungkook's ring on his finger, solid yet tender with love. With a promise.

Jimin feels alive.

Eventually, Namjoon nudges him lightly. He opens his eyes, looking up at the other man.

"Our train leaves in 30 minutes. Ready to go?"

Jimin hardly realized how the time went by.

He smiles.

"Yes. I'm ready."

-End-

Beautiful artwork for this fic by Alek.Dar!

End Notes

Wow. I can't believe it's finally over.

I truly, sincerely hope you enjoyed this story. If you did, PLEASE don't hesitate to let me know your thoughts in the comments!! It would make me so happy to hear every little bit of your thoughts, no matter how long!! I would love to hear from you. Your comments and kind words keep me going and motivate me to write.

Thank you so much for accompanying me on this journey. Your kind comments and support really kept me going. I'm kinda tearing up as I type this. This is the longest story I'd ever written. I hope you like the ending? This is the only fic I've ever written where I did not visualize the ending right at the start. Somehow, as I wrote chapter by chapter, the road paved itself to this direction. It just felt right to me.

A huge thank you once again to my sweetheart Sunny (SunnyJinx) who made this story possible.

ALSO!!!!!!!!! THIS FIC HAS ART NOW!!!!!!!! You'll find them in chapter 3, 12, 16 and this one!!

I'm not sure if it shows, but this fic was something I'd been working on for ages. I was going through a really bad burnout when it came to writing fic, and this as the WIP I found myself having the motivation to return to time and time again, because I was so invested in seeing it to the end!!

If you enjoyed this story and would like to help me out right now or make any requests, you can find more details and links here!
It has everything from all of my writing to current projects to links you can support me with!

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